

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

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**SOUTHERN WOMANHOOD: A STORY BEHIND THE
SOUTHERN BELLE**

Jižanské ženství: příběh za jižanskou kráskou

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE
Praha, květen 2015

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Declaration

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto magisterskou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného či stejného titulu.

I declare that the following MA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the source of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

V Praze dne 4.5.2015

.....
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Permission

Souhlasím se zapůjčením magisterské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the MA thesis being borrowed and used to study purposes.

Acknowledgements

Moja vďaka v prvom rade patrí PhDr. Hane Ulmanovej Ph.D., M.A., za jej cennú podporu a svätú trpezlivosť, mojej rodine, špeciálne mojej matke za jej neskonalú podporu a v neposlednej rade tiež priateľom za ich pomoc a postrehy.

I would like to thank first and foremost to PhDr. Hana Ulmanová Ph.D., M.A., for her unfailing encouragement and holy patience, to my family especially Mrs. Petrušová for her charming support and last, but not least to my friends for their proofreading and helpful comments. Thank you.

Abstract

The present MA thesis focuses on the development of the archetype of the Southern Belle in the selected works of American fiction, namely John Pendleton Kennedy's *Swallow Barn*, William Faulkner's *Sanctuary* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*. The main task is to explore how the archetype of the Southern Belle was constructed and (if) transgressed at different times in the American literary tradition from the period of antebellum South to the era of Southern Renaissance. Since the archetype of the Southern Belle is connected with the white upper class society it will be also discussed in this respect. By comparing texts from different historical periods I want to compare the different nature of cultural and social conditions that contributed and informed the meaning and the function of the Southern Belle. Moreover, by selecting Southern woman writer and Southern male writers respectively I want to compare female and male perspective on the literary representation of the Southern Belle.

The first chapter briefly addresses the development of the American South as a region with a distinct social structure and cultural values and attempts to position the figure of the Southern Belle within that socio-historical context. Chapters three, four and five introduce and analyze the archetype of the Southern Belle in the selected works in the chronological order from the period of the antebellum South to the period of the Southern Renaissance. Each of these three chapters is divided into two parts: the first part deals with the socio-historical context that informed the archetype of the Southern Belle and the second part of the chapter consists of the close analysis of this archetype in the selected text. The final chapter provides the interpretations of the Southern Belle by using feminist and gender theories of Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler as well as short comparative and final analysis of the Southern Belle's evolution based on the previous chapters.

Key Words: South, women, belle, antebellum, Southern Renaissance, gender, feminism

Abstrakt

Diplomová práca sa zaoberá vývojom archetypu južanskej krásy vo vybraných dielach popredných spisovateľov amerického Juhu. Na diskusiu o archetype južanskej krásy som si konkrétne vybrala román *Swallow Barn* od Johna Pendletona Kennedyho, spisovateľa virginiských plantáží, následne román *Svätyňa* od Williama Faulknera a svoj výber zakončujem románom Margaret Mitchellovej – *Odviata vetrom*.

Aby si čitatelia čo najskôr objasnili, že vývoj amerického Juhu tvorí špecifickú kapitolu vo vývoji americkej kultúry a spoločnosti, úvodná kapitola mapuje v skratke jeho spoločensko-historický vývoj a popisuje okolnosti vzniku archetypu južanskej krásy a jej postavenia v spoločnosti a v kontexte obdobia pred americkou občianskou vojnou.

Samotné jadro diplomovej práce sa potom nachádza v kapitolách číslo tri, štyri a päť, kde je archetyp južanskej krásy analyzovaný z hľadiska jednak chronologického, to znamená od obdobia tzv. starého Juhu až po obdobie južanskej renesancie a následne kontrastuje mužskú a ženskú perspektívu na archetyp južanskej krásy. Každá z menovaných troch kapitol je postupne členená na dve časti: prvá časť má za úlohu uviesť dielo a aj autora do spoločensko historického kontextu a druhá časť sa venuje detailnej analýze ženskej postavy-južanskej krásy v danom diele.

Keďže je diplomová práca koncipovaná interdisciplinárne, to znamená, že okrem poznatkov z literárnej histórie, teórie a kritiky vychádza aj z poznatkov feministickej a rodovej teórie Simone de Beauvoirovej a neskôr Judit Butlerovej je záverečná kapitola koncipovaná ako snaha o akési prepojenie vývoja archetypu južanskej krásy v kontexte de Beauvoirovej konceptu ženy ako „tej Druhej“ a Butlerovej koncepcii rodu ako preformativity.

Kľúčové slová: Juh, ženy, južanská kráska, starý Juh, južanská renesancia, rod, feminizmus

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Origins of Southern Distinctiveness

Like all questions concerning the historical development of the nation, the point at which the label “Southern”¹ began to possess the characteristics that are based on sociocultural as well as geographical distinctiveness is largely a matter of perception. Initially, as James C. Cobb explains, the American colonies were divided between the “eastern colonies of New England and the “southern” ones, which included the remained stretching from New York all the way down to Georgia.”² With the country’s gradual development, this dissection was modified when “New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware became the middle colonies, leaving southern to apply only to Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia.”³ By the end of the colonial era, close observers in both the northern and the southern states became increasingly aware of some distinctions between their societies. Thomas Jefferson affirmed the contrasting characters and temperament that separated people of the North from ----- people of the South. In his observations he further notes,

In the North, they are cool, sober, laborious, independent, jealous of their own liberties, and just to those of others, interested, chicaning, superstitious and hypocritical in their religion. In the South they are fiery, voluptuary, indolent, unsteady, jealous for their own liberties, but tramping on those of others, generous, candid, without attachment or pretentions to any religion but that of the heart.⁴

While Jefferson ascribed these differences between the north and the south to the difference in climate of each region, there were many other observers that were not persuaded by the climatic interpretation of regional traits. A foreign observer Marquis de Chastellux believed that Virginians differed from those who lived north

¹ The American South, just like the American Midwest or the American West are not only the designations for the geographical areas of the United States, but they are also regions that have distinct culture and history. This thesis considers the American South as a culturally and historically specific region and that is the reason why I use capitalization. If there is a word referring to the South written as “south” or “southern” it is only for the purpose of preserving the original quotation.

² James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 9.

³ Cobb, 9.

⁴ Cobb, 10.

and east of the Chesapeake “not only in the nature of their climate, soil and agriculture, but also in that indelible character which every nation acquires at the moment of its origin, and which by perpetuating itself from generation to generation, justifies this great principle, that everything which is partakes of what has been.”⁵ According to Chastellux, Virginia’s general social and political demeanor would “always be aristocratic”⁶

Chastellux was not the only observer to emphasize the regional differences between Americans. In fact, the eagerness to discover the reason behind the southern distinctiveness was expressed by a number of other possible explanations. By the 1830s writers and observers sought to explain the reason why the inhabitants of the northern states and those of the southern states appeared to be different in temperament and values had begun to seize on the idea that the North and the South had originally been settled by two distinct groups of immigrants, each with their own ethos. Northerners were said to be descendants of seventeenth century English Puritan Roundheads, who had supported the monarchy, while the Southerners were aristocratic Cavaliers, supposedly of Norman descent. Historian David Hackett Fischer has argued that the “cavalier thesis” may at least have some validity for Virginia. “Although some seventy-five percent of the colony’s immigrants consisted of indentured servants and landless whites, in the mid-seventeenth century it had served as the only city of refuge left in His Majesty’s Dominions... for distressed Cavaliers.”⁷

Although exceptional, the example of Virginia and its cavalier legend grew to be very influential and it was very quickly appropriated in other southern states. This contributed to the evolution of the two distinct kinds of Americans: on one hand, there were individualistic, hard-working and money-oriented Yankees. On the other hand, there were Yankees’ antipodes, the Cavaliers who were characterized as non-materialistic, brave, honorable and gentle.

⁵ Cobb, 11.

⁶ Cobb, 11.

⁷ Cobb, 22.

1.2 Southern Gentlemen and Ladies

Southerners prided themselves on maintaining an ordered society on top of which was the planter class. The planter - Cavalier image represented the pinnacle of white Southern manhood. Defined by his chivalry, honor, bravery, and skills as horseman and fighter he represented the impersonation of all the characteristics that the southerners found valuable. The logical companion to the idealized image of a southern cavalier was the southern lady. Southern customs are that the proper southern lady has all the attributes of the Victorian ideals of true womanhood, which consisted of four characteristics.

Firstly, a true Southern woman was expected to be completely devoted to her husband and her family. The Southern lady belonged to the private, domestic sphere where she took charge of all that was going on. As Barbara Welter claims in her essay "The True Womanhood," the Southern mistress' duty was to "raise virtuous, patriotic citizens, all for the honor of her husband and the family's name."⁸ Secondly, a key to the proper Southern lady's presentation was her sexual purity. Upon her marriage, when she gained the status of a respectable woman, this status required faithfulness to her husband and her newly established family. Another quality expected of the Southern lady was piety. She attended church regularly, professed faith in God, and committed her time to charitable work. All these qualities, moreover, must have been in agreement with the most important one - submissiveness. This was perhaps the most feminine of virtues. Men were also supposed to be religious, although not generally. Men were supposed to be pure, although nobody could really expect it. Nevertheless, men were never expected to be submissive. Men were active in life, doers of the action. Women, on the contrary, were passive, submitting to fate, to duty, to God and to men.

⁸ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly* 18.2 (Summer 1966) 153.

1.3 The Southern Belle

The upper classes recognized a distinct period prior to the point when a young woman in the South became a Southern lady, lasting perhaps several years during the time when she made the transition from dependence on her father to her husband. This period in a young woman's life was filled with parties, making visits and trips to friends and relatives, wearing fashionable clothes and flirting with her potential suitors. It was the time of a Southern Belle. As southern tradition has it, a Southern Belle is a young, upper-class woman that is experiencing the most exciting times of her life. As the *Companion to Southern Literature* explains: "If trained right, the belle had, by her early teen years, already acquired most of the makings of the southern lady: she was beautiful or potentially beautiful, graceful, charming, virtuous, loyal to family, submissive to father, in need of men's protection, yet resourceful and brave when unusual circumstances called on her to be."⁹ Since courtship, romance, and ultimately marriage were considered the highest aspirations in her life, she was allowed to have additional characteristics that would help her to reach her ultimate goal. She could be "innocently flirtatious, winsome, spirited, haughty, spunky, mischievous, impulsive"¹⁰ but these liberties had to be abandoned once she acquired a suitable husband.

Functioning within the larger context of southern life, perhaps no other figure represents the antebellum period better than the figure of the Southern Belle. The perfect balance of beauty and modesty, the southern charm and innocence of the Southern Belle has been immensely influential in the treatment of southern womanhood that not only endured during the period of the Old South, but also managed to survive the Civil War and Reconstruction. Some critics like Anne Prior Scott believe that the image "continued to shape the behavior of southern women for many years and has never entirely disappeared."¹¹ Having said that, it can be further

⁹ Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda H. MacKethan eds., *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs*. (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2002) 95.

¹⁰ Flora, 96.

¹¹ Anne Prior Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930*. (USA: University Press of Virginia, 1995) x.

argued that the image of the Southern Belle stands as the symbol of the South itself. The Southern Belle served as a way for Southerners to build their sense of identity, the feminine characterization of the South served as their own justification of their superior position in the relation to the North. The South was a region of cultivated manners and graces, whereas the masculine, cold industrial North lacked proper morals and good manners. The figure of the Southern Belle has been, from the start, devised as a larger than life figure which has stood not only as the idealized representation of white Southern women but also represents the very hearth of Southern patriotism. W.J. Cash called the idolatry of Southern white women:

downright gyneolatry... Hardly a sermon...did not begin and end with tributes in her honor, hardly a brave speech... did not open and close with the clashing of shields and the flourishing of swords for her glory. At the last, I verily believe, the ranks of Confederacy went rolling into battle in the misty conviction that it was wholly for her that they fought¹²

In its worst form the idolization of the Southern Belle, and hence, the Southern white woman was used to justify the barbarism of lynching of black men. After the abolition of slavery, the ideal of the white southern belle was used as a means of controlling and repressing Southern blacks. African Americans were portrayed as the violators of the traditional white order in which the white woman stood as a symbol of family and class.

2. Southern Womanhood and Feminist Literary Criticism

Up until the past three decades, there was limited representation of Southern women in the accounts of its history and literature. In comparison to the history of men in the antebellum South and later historical periods, women were either excluded and marginalized or stereotyped. With the emergence of the female voice as the prominent voice in the American literature of the nineteenth century,¹³ critics

¹² W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*. (New York: Vintage, 1941) 89.

¹³ As Nina Baym writes in her *Woman's Fiction*: "The men lost a good professional opportunity by declining to write woman's fiction, which enjoyed extraordinary success during the 1850s and 1860s." in Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America 1820-1870* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993) xi.

started to reflect on the representation of Southern womanhood.¹⁴ Also, with the birth of women's studies and feminist criticism, the way in which literary texts are read has changed significantly. Ellen Rooney explains that feminist critics claim to have good cause for questioning scholarly objectivity and critical absolutism: "For a better understanding of how genders have been formed and represented, feminist literary theory has to contravene the limitations and restrictions between literature, the social sciences and also philosophy."¹⁵ Feminists have examined literature as a tool for creating and keeping belief systems.

There are numerous approaches to the feminist reading of the texts from the theoretical as well as the methodological perspective.¹⁶ Furthermore, a text can be analyzed contextually from the social, political, historical or cultural perspective. As my primary interest lies within archetypal feminist cultural and critical theory, I would like to use it as the main framework for which I will analyze the myth of the Southern Belle which will be also examined from the socio-historical perspective.

2.1 Archetype and Stereotype

The term archetype conveys variant meanings in various contexts. The origin of the term archetype is derived from the Greek "archi," a beginning or first instance, and "typos" a stamp, and denotes a primordial form, the original of a series of variations. In literature there can be a model typological characterization of protagonists in a text, it can be also a model situation or a model story. From the perspective of Foucault's theory of power and also that part of feminist literary

¹⁴ Catherine Clinton's pioneering work *The Plantation Mistress: Women's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon, 1982); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Jean E. Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Joan E. Cashin, ed., *Our Common Affairs: Texts from Women in the Old South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) For single and young women in the South, see Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1800-1865*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Giselle Roberts, *The Confederate Belle* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003); and Steven M. Stowe, "Growing Up Female in the Planter Class," *Helicon Nine* 17 (1987): 194-205.

¹⁵ Ellen Rooney ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) vi.

¹⁶ From the theoretical perspective we can apply the ecofeminist perspective, queer theory perspective, liberal feminist perspective, anarchofeminist perspective, cyberfeminist perspective etc. From the methodological point of view that examines the textual elements, we can evaluate a text on the basis of semiotic analysis, semantic analysis, or discursive analysis.

criticism that draws on his theory, archetype is viewed not as something essential that is given, but as the constructs that are formed by particular context and thus the consequences of a dominant discourse that influences them.

Keeping this in mind, this fluid character of archetypes is what distinguishes them from an etymologically close term - stereotype. The term stereotype is derived from Greek which means “firm and/or solid” and typos as already defined in archetype. The term stereotype, as Annis Pratt states in her book *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction*, was first used in the printing press “to designate an original plate”¹⁷ from which “subsequent imprints are made and connoting an excessively rigid set of generalizations”¹⁸ Archetype, thus, unlike a stereotype, can be subject to a variety of perceptions, not only from a culture to culture but also within a given culture or in an individual mind. As Pratt further explains: “Archetypes thus constitute images, symbols, and narrative patterns that differ from stereotypes in being complex variables, subject to variations in perceptions.”¹⁹

2.2 Archetype and Feminism

Poststructuralist feminist criticism views archetypes from the perspective of their deconstruction. It examines how these archetypes are created, how they influence the power politics and what their implications are for the creation of identity. This perspective is central to Simone de Beauvoir's crucial work of feminist philosophy, *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir, in the chapter called “Myths,” provides an extensive analysis of the myths and concludes that the reason why the myths of the woman came to be accepted as the absolute truth is the male dominance: “Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as a relative to him.”²⁰ This notion of referentiality is then used by patriarchy to ensure “natural” order in the power relations.

¹⁷ Annis Pratt, *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction*. (USA: Indiana University Press, 1981) 3.

¹⁸ Annis Pratt, *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction*. (USA: Indiana University Press, 1981) 3.

¹⁹ Pratt, 4.

²⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Lowe&Brydone Ltd., 1956) 16.

Perhaps the most echoed and revolutionary thought from *The Second Sex* is de Beauvoir's assertion that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."²¹ Drawing from the door opened by de Beauvoir who viewed gender as a phenomenon that is - socially constructed, Judith Butler views gender attributes - the characteristic traits that society labels as masculine or feminine as performative - as behaviors learned through imitations. If gender is viewed in that manner, then gender identity becomes not something that is essential to a human being, but rather a "regulatory fiction."²² In discussing gender roles in connection to the archetype of Southern Belle, Judith Butler's theories of gender as well as de Beauvoir's theories of woman as the Other are particularly resonant.

2.3 Aims and Methods

This thesis aims to show - precisely how the Old South's feminine ideals were constructed and maintained over time and how southern elite (re) defined, enacted and/or maintained the distinctive role of Southern Belle while others resisted, modified or debunked these ideals. By applying feminist and gender theories to the selected novels, I would like to show how the cultural archetype of the Southern Belle served as a socially constructed norm that ensured their passivity and usefulness to patriarchy. In this sense, the thesis can be situated within the broad rubric of femininity, structures of power, domination and hierarchy.

In each chapter I will focus on a novel that was conditioned by the historical experience in which the texts themselves are embedded. History is important for my discussion, but this is primarily a literary, not a historical study, so I restricted historical analysis to places where it provides a necessary context for understanding of the shifting position of the Southern Belle figure. Each of the following novels: Thomas Pendleton Kennedy's *The Swallow Barn*, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*, William Faulkner's *Sanctuary*, will be examined with the focus on the image of Southern Belle. Each of the chapters on the novel under analysis will investigate the following two questions: How did the Southern writers (writers about the South) view Southern femininity in their works? and: How did the Southern elite female

²¹ Beauvoir, 273.

²² Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 239.

character define or perform their femininity? Ultimately, the thesis seeks to examine how white Southern women are conciliated, as they cannot enact the strain of idealized true womanhood imposed on them.

3. The Southern Belle as an Antebellum Idol

3.1 Historical Contexts and the Birth of the Plantation Novel

After the Americans won their independence from Great Britain in the American Revolution, the new nation slowly started to build its own identity. English traditions were immediately swept away and the country started to experiment with the republican ideas when drafting a constitution and modeling its political system. Nearly every aspect of American life was touched by the Revolution.²³ The Market revolution also contributed to the nation's development as it caused increase in manufacturing and production that provided an economic independence. In addition, all these major changes brought important societal changes. People moved to large cities to find jobs in the factories and the vision of a better future attracted many immigrants who came to America searching for a new life.

Nevertheless, nationalism that surely triumphed during the revolutionary era started to slowly disappear and the disagreements between the North and South became more visible and more frequent. The reason for this growing strife between south and north can be found in the fact that the aftermath of the American Revolution caused different development in the two regions. While the North experienced dramatic and revolutionary changes after the American War (e.g. urbanization, factory production and concepts such as liberty and equality), the South - where the War was fought longer and more fiercely - oriented itself on renovation more than innovation. The South's strong hold onto planter economy was connected with the region's reliance on cotton production. Moreover, with the adoption of new machinery, especially cotton gin, the production of cotton became faster and more profitable. During the 1830s and 1840s, southern states were recognized as the most important producers and suppliers of cotton worldwide. This mass production of cotton also met with the higher demand for slave labor, thus resulting in economic conflicts over regional interests and making southerners more aware of their position as slave owners in a republic that promoted the idea of democracy and equality.

As Charles Reagan Wilson explains, it was not the Civil War that was the crucial watershed in southern history but rather in the time "after 1830s the self-conscious identification with "the South" notably increased, a distinctive pattern of institutions,

²³ Justin Quinn ed., *Lectures on American Literature* (Prague: Karolinum, 2011) 53.

values, myths and rituals took shape, reflecting a southern worldview that developed but never fully matured before the Civil War.”²⁴ The question of slave labor resonated in the American society for a long time but it was not until the 1830s that significant members of middle-class Northerners began to agitate for the emancipation of slaves and for their incorporation into the new republic. In 1831, Boston abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison published the first issue of his most influential newspaper in antebellum antislavery activism, *The Liberator*, that bore the motto “No Union with slaveholders” that not only attracted numerous supporters of the dissolution of the Union but also awakened great anti-abolitionist sentiments in the South. Thus, the 1830s mark a clash between the abolition activism on one hand, versus growing demand for slaves due to the increasing cotton production on the other, splitting the South between accepted traditions, and progress dictated by the North.

In these times of crisis, and to overcome its difficulties, the South turned into what Jay B. Hubbel calls “ a Greek democracy with slavery at its corner-stone. A new spirit appeared in Southern oratory, journalism and fiction – bombastic, boastful and slightly hysterical.”²⁵ In literature, as Hubbel notes, there was a particular effort to reestablish the “Southern Chivalry” as to counter the image of a self-made man who was already making his way into American society. In channeling their efforts to preserve the traditional values, white novelists of the South influenced by historical romances of Sir Walter Scott and partly by the already-established genre of the sentimental novel created a uniquely southern literary subgenre in the plantation novel. The plantation novel is defined by Joseph M. Flora as a genre that depicts “the planter’s life of ease, gentility and power”²⁶ and portrays plantation as an idealized world populated by characters that later developed into types. These types are defined around social elements such as gender role or class expectation. Each character type was expected to convey a set of personal qualities, both virtues and vices and in addition, each character type had to conform to a fixed ideal of distinctive clothes, language and manners.

²⁴ Charles Reagan Wilson, William Ferris eds., *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989)

²⁵ J.B. Hubbel, *The South in American Literature, 1607-1900* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1954) xxvi.

²⁶ Joseph M. Flora, Lucinda H. MacKethan eds., *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements, and Motifs* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2002) 217.

3.2 The Swallow Barn

The foremost example of the plantation subgenre of literature is considered to be John Pendleton Kennedy's novel *Swallow Barn* that is probably the first important fictional treatment of Virginia life. When *Swallow Barn* was first published in 1832, praise of the novel was almost universal in the southern press. Southern Quarterly Review, for example, praised the fact that the novel had been written

con amore, with all the affection of the lover, but none of his blindness. He (Mr. Kennedy) has brought out all that is noble, genial and generous...and the picture is set in the very best lights too, yet the little weaknesses, the odd points, the obvious vanity, and the unconscious assumption of the good and stately old mother, are slyly insinuated and sufficiently indicated, as to make it a very decided portion of the picture.²⁷

In more recent times, literary scholars such as Charles D. Bohner celebrated *Swallow Barn*'s "virtue of authenticity"²⁸ and a well-informed historian of Southern literature, Professor Jay B. Hubbel, called it "the best picture of Virginia life in the early nineteenth century."²⁹ Yet, as *Swallow Barn* reflects the picture of nineteenth century Virginia it should be noted that the novel may have served as a portrait of historical and contemporary tradition, yet it also served as a product of a certain ideology and therefore a perpetrator of established conventions.

Swallow Barn opens with the introductory chapter "A Word in Advance" where the narrator describes the story as "a picture of country life in Virginia as it existed in the first quarter of the present century."³⁰ His travel account, which has many features of "romance" with its idealized descriptions and pastoral setting of the old plantation, is concerned with the domestic habits and political affairs of Virginia plantation society. From the beginning, the narrator also stresses that the narrative we are about

²⁷ qtd in Charles H. Bohner's "Swallow Barn: John P. Kennedy's Chronicle of Virginia Society." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*. Vol. 68, No. 3 (Jul., 1960) 326.

²⁸ Charles H. Bohner, "Swallow Barn: John P. Kennedy's Chronicle of Virginia Society." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*. Vol. 68, No. 3 (Jul., 1960) 329.

²⁹ J.B. Hubbel, *The South in American Literature, 1607-1900* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1954) 492.

³⁰ John Pendleton Kennedy, *Swallow Barn*; or, A Sojourn in The Old Dominion (Philadelphia: J.B.Lippincott, 1860) 8.

to read should be classified neither as a novel nor as any other representative of a particular genre: “you shall hear from me again presently; but whether in some descriptive pictures of this old dominion, or in dramatic sketches, or in a journal, or in some other rambling letters, I cannot yet foretell.”³¹

After receiving the book, William Wirt - an American statesman who was the inspiration for Kennedy’s major work of non-fiction “Memoirs of the Life of William Wirt” - probably best summarized it as “a sort of novel of which the scene is laid in Virginia- but it is a nondescript sort of a novel – very little incident - & a great deal of what is called sketches of characters.”³² Mark Littleton, the narrator of the novel, seems to agree with Wirt’s interpretation as he introduces himself as a tourist who is “a man of mark and authentic witness”³³ who “travels pen in hand”³⁴ showing how his impressions are more distinct “than those of a business voyager.”³⁵ This suggests that the narrator is going to present a picture of Virginia county that is not entirely objective and realistic, but rather he wants to paint and design this life for the reader. He is painting a pastoral image of the Old Dominion’s “mellow, bland and sunny luxuriance,”³⁶ “good fellowship”³⁷ and its “insulated cast of manners”³⁸ that has disappeared since the progress in American society, which strives towards uniformity rather than distinction. In addition, when the narrator notes that he is going to describe Virginia life as it “existed in the first quarter of the present century”,³⁹ it suggests that the visitor’s image is not going to deal with the actual status quo in the south, but that it will be a sentimental picture of a society that once existed. The narrator’s non-objective approach is supported by Kennedy’s use of the subtitle of the narrative, “A Sojourn in the Old Dominion,” which indicates a stay “that is a casual and self-indulgent undertaking”⁴⁰.

The use of the pastoral imagery in *Swallow Barn* is indeed not a coincidence.

³¹ Kennedy, 10.

³² qtd in J.B. Hubbel’s , *The South in American Literature, 1607-1900* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1954) 492.

³³ Kennedy, 16.

³⁴ Kennedy, 16.

³⁵ Kennedy, 16.

³⁶ Kennedy, 16.

³⁷ Kennedy, 16.

³⁸ Kennedy, 16.

³⁹ Kennedy, 10.

⁴⁰ Zeno Ackermann, “Working at Romance, Poetics and Ideology in Novels of the Antebellum American South, 1824-1854.” (Diss. Universitat Regensburg, 2004), 52.

As Lucinda McKethan notes in her introduction to the 1986 edition, Kennedy published his novel “only a year after the slave Nat Turner led a bloody revolt against whites in tidewater Virginia, the *Swallow Barn* was offered as a chronicle of a pleasant, peaceful plantation society located in the same area.”⁴¹ Kennedy, informed about the changes that were affecting the South and namely Southern society, thus uses pastoral images for ideological reasons, to preserve it from the history where the question of national identity and specifically southern identity begins to fall apart. Virginia is, in this portrayal, a nation within a nation that is protected from any modernization or progress as it “has no large towns where men may meet and devise improvements or changes in the arts of life.”⁴²

Similarly to the image of the plantation being isolated from the historical development and change, the characters in the *Swallow Barn* also reflect a certain fixedness. Kennedy’s use of names and characters in the stylized patterns that dominate in the nineteenth century romance genre reveals their personalities and functions in the story. As this thesis deals with the representation of the Southern Belle in literature, in the following chapter we shall focus on the character of the Southern Belle that appears in *Swallow Barn*; Bel Tracy.

⁴¹ John P. Kennedy, *Swallow Barn, Or, A Sojourn in the Old Dominion* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1986) xi.

⁴² Kennedy, 71.

3.3 Bel Tracy

When the character of Bel Tracy appears in the novel for the first time, the narrator describes her as

headlong, thoughtless, with quick impulses, that give her the charm of agreeable expression, although her features are irregular, and would not stand a critical examination. Her skin is not altogether clear, her mouth is large, her eyes of a dark grey hue.⁴³

Bel's first appearance in the novel establishes her physical appearance as flawed, but nevertheless still attractive to men, since it is primarily her charm that makes her attractive. Such description of a belle figure as a rather ordinary girl when it comes to physical description but who knows how to use her charm is an important point since it provides an easier identification of female readership with the heroine. As Kathryn Lee Seidel explains:

an increasing part of the reading audience between 1820 and 1850 were women whom prosperity had blessed with leisure time in which to read, and who were interested in reading about the situation of other women like themselves, whose sphere was essentially the home and whose lives were absorbed with marriage and children.⁴⁴

This point is crucial in understanding the motivations of Kennedy's portrayal of a Southern Belle. Not all young white southern women could be the incarnation of beauty, but they all could be considered to be belles if they acquired one quality, the capacity to fascinate. Above all, fascination was the crucial feature of the Southern Belle. The Southern Belle's ability to fascinate subsequently served her as a means to achieve the most important relationship during her lifetime, a relationship with a male. The Southern Belle's social standing depends on her taking a husband and marriage is her ultimate life fulfillment.

The tradition of antebellum courtship was in fact instilled in young southern women since their birth since it is part of their prescribed class expectations. As Fang Wei explains: "a Southern Belle's behavior is bound to stringent social patterns based on

⁴³ Kennedy, 78.

⁴⁴ Kathryn Lee Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1985) 3.

manner. The belle's admiration and idealization of chivalry, i.e. the concept of men courting and worshipping women is one of the results of her upbringing."⁴⁵ The traditional patriarchal tradition of the antebellum south required that belles should be raised differently to their brothers. They frequently expected to perform a few tasks that were often connected with domestic management and were expected to stay home until they were suitable for marriage - that again presupposed a life in the domestic sphere.

We can also perceive this in Kennedy's characterization of Bel Tracy. Even though she is a skilled musician and equestrian, all her accomplishments are motivated by the quest for a cavalier. As the narrator suggests, Belle's hunt for an ideal husband has become one of her pastimes: "Bel has a great admiration for an elegant, refined, sweet-spoken grave and dignified gentleman - that's a hobby of hers."⁴⁶ In addition, it seems that this "skill" is also the only skill that she acquired autonomously - though it is true that Bel is a very talented horsewoman, she did learn this from her brother: "He (Ralph) is famous for his horsemanship and avows a strong partiality for Bel on account of her skill in the same art, which, Ralph says, comes altogether from his teaching."⁴⁷ Furthermore, when she is depicted riding a horse, the central focus is again on her figure, dress and face, rather than describing her style or riding technique:

Her figure showed to great advantage on horseback, being graceful and easy. Her dress was a riding habit of nankeen, fancifully trimmed with green, and fitting her shape with accurate adaptation. She wore a light hat of the same color as her dress, sufficiently prominent to guard her face from the sun, without concealing it; and over her right shoulder floated a green veil, that descended from the hat, and fluttered in the breeze as she moved forward.⁴⁸

Hence, even though she is skilled at something that was not considered to be an entirely feminine art - thus resisting the typical representation of the romantic heroine as passive and suffering - the narrative still subordinates Bel to the position of a

⁴⁵ Fang Wei, "Blanche's Destruction: Feminist Analysis on A Streetcar Named Desire." *Canadian Social Science* Vol. 4 No. 3, (June 2008) 103.

⁴⁶ Kennedy, 113.

⁴⁷ Kennedy, 86.

⁴⁸ Kennedy, 93.

passive receiver rather than an active agent according to the patriarchal tradition of the Old South.

The influence of place in the plantation novel plays a crucial role in the Southern Belle's development. As Kathryn Lee Seidel explains, the belle figure in American fiction differs significantly from the heroines of the sentimental and domestic novels written by women in the nineteenth century. In such novels "a young heroine is cut off from her family, must earn her own living, fend off seducers, and marry Mr. Right, all because she rejects emotion as her only lodestar and prefers to view life sensibly. The southern belle, however, is usually not orphaned, remains in the plantation, may be temporarily attracted to the unsuitable seducers and sometimes rejects the sensible in favor of easy, the vain, the rich."⁴⁹ The isolation of the Belle then leads to a certain sense of arrested development where she is denied any activity besides the one that is appropriate for her class and sex. This isolation should also protect her from the outer world where evil might harm her.

Bel Tracy is living in the Brakes, the plantation setting which is secluded and set up by her father (she has no mother). As the narrator tells us, the household is "conducted with a degree of precision that throws a certain air of stateliness over the whole family."⁵⁰ The description of the household reflects the appearance of the plantation house: an "aristocratical old edifice that sits like a brooding hen on the southern bank of the River James."⁵¹ This "time honored mansion"⁵² is also "a secluded spot, cut off from much of that sort of commerce with the world which is almost essential to enliven and mature the sympathies of young persons."⁵³ The plantation thus functions as a self-contained system with a stable social order, maintained by the plantation master and secluded from the urban environment of Virginia. As the plantation remains secluded from the outside world and the old mansion has passed through history untouched, so too are the Tracys themselves isolated; in both place and time. As Ned Hazard confesses: "She (Bel) reads descriptions of ladies of chivalry and takes the field in imitation of them. Her head is full of these fancies, and she almost persuades herself that this is the fourteenth

⁴⁹ Kathryn Lee Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1985) 4.

⁵⁰ Kennedy, 77.

⁵¹ Kennedy, 27.

⁵² Kennedy, 27.

⁵³ Kennedy, 64.

century.”⁵⁴ Unable to distinguish between the past and the present, raised without mother but with an authoritative father in an isolated world of the plantation, Bel interprets her present from the books that deal with the past. If she is delusional it is not because she willingly desires it, in the way that her father detests to leave an already bygone era, it is rather that she has no other point of reference. In Bel’s immense obsession with historical romances, Kennedy is critiquing the old south’s denial of complex female education, a stance which produced nothing more than “an artless girl, tranquilly gliding towards womanhood in the seclusion of the parent bower...remote from the tawdry artifices of a compact and crowded society.”⁵⁵ The Southern Belle can be educated, but she should not be overly educated as she would present a threat to the patriarchal ideal. Instead, she should be a popular entertainment, an object of admiration and an object of the male gaze. According to Katherine Seidel, the lack of education or the consequence of poor home education has negative effects on the young woman since it has “developed only her narcissistic opinion of herself as a lovely bauble”.⁵⁶ As the novel develops, we can notice that Pendleton styles Bel into such positions. Bel, even though she is one of the central characters in the narration, appears only sparsely in the novel’s forty-nine chapters; most of the time we can see her acting like a girl-child, dancing and singing. At the same time, even though she can realistically be between fourteen and seventeen, she is also on the verge of womanhood - as indicated by her physical descriptions that often accentuate her figure. She is rarely engaged in non-courtship conversations with other characters and, if she is, the conversation is always centered on her narcissistic opinion about herself or her physicality. A relevant episode is the dialogue concerning lucky numbers where Mr. Chubb names numerous mythical characters and legends from the past. Nevertheless the only thing that captures Bel’s attention is the fact that: “the Graces were three young women, and the Furies, three old ones: And that three is the luckiest number in arithmetic.”⁵⁷

Bel commands attention not only in regards to her beauty and vivaciousness but also in her behavior towards her suitors, thus fulfilling the masculine assumption of the

⁵⁴ Kennedy, 86.

⁵⁵ Kennedy, 43.

⁵⁶ Kathryn Lee Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1985) 10.

⁵⁷ Kennedy, 227.

female being emotionally repressed. As Southern manners have it, a proper Southern Belle, popular and beautiful, flirts with her suitors, but she should not express her sexuality openly since she is also considered to be sexually pure and innocent. When Bel meets Ned she snubs him or reacts haughtily, nevertheless, Bel's inaccessible attitude heightens rather than deters Ned's passion. In the scene when Ned and Mark go fishing together, Ned tells a story of his first private encounter with Bel:

About a year ago, we had a dinner party at the Brakes-rather a merry one, and I drank a little too much champagne; and being possessed with a devil- for I can't account for it any other way-I got to walking with Bel after night-fall on the porch... and in the end, popped the question at her like the crack of a rifle.

And what then?

Oh, she behaved with the most admirable spirit. She turned round promptly and went into the house, without saying a word; leaving me to construe that as I might choose to take it.

You think she encourages you?

She didn't refuse me, said Ned, and I consider that encouragement. The truth is, Mark, Bel rather likes me, but she doesn't like to show it.⁵⁸

Yet, despite the power the narrator claims Bel has over Ned Hazard in their romantic relationship - during which she constantly dismisses Ned, who is not able to fulfill the chivalric image she expects - the authority proves to be an illusion; Bel acts first and foremost to support the men in her life, particularly her father. The narrator foreshadows this fact early in the novel, saying that Bel is a spirited and talented woman and not an entirely delicate and will-less creature, but is yet under the control of her father:

Nature has given her an exuberant flow of spirits, which in spite of a stiff and rigid education imposed by her father frequently breaks through the trammels of discipline, and shows itself in various forms of the volatile temper assumes in the actions of an airy and healthful girl. She has been accustomed to the cautious and authoritative admonitions of her father, which have inculcated a

⁵⁸ Kennedy, 115-116.

severe and exaggerated sense of personal respect, and rather too rigorous estimate of the properties and privileges of her own sex.⁵⁹

This passage of Bel's description as unrestrained yet rigidly controlled woman suggests that Bel has never had a chance for her own authority - her father is shaping her opinions and manners. Her father therefore reserves ultimate control over whom she will marry. Thus, Bel becomes a possession that is to be handed down from the hands of her father to the hands of her husband who will in turn exercise his patriarchal power over her.

While Bel's depiction resists a traditional image of the figure of southern belle that is a fragile and will-less creature, her behavior and cultural values seem to confirm her acceptance of the patriarchal tradition. By introducing the character of Bel Tracy, Kennedy stresses that the essentials of the Belle's attractiveness have not always been built upon her great beauty alone but perhaps also upon her charm. The values of femininity delineated by Kennedy have not only dominated and perpetuated the historical understanding of southern womanhood during the antebellum period, but they also started a tradition that was later subverted and criticized.

⁵⁹ Kennedy, 78.

4. The Ugly Side of the Southern Belle: William Faulkner

4.1 White Southern Womanhood and the Post-bellum South

The antebellum society established the image of the Southern Belle that was tied to Southern antebellum ideals of chivalry, class and the Victorian definition of woman as an angel in the house. Her body was inscribed with “the integrity and glamour of the South itself and her sexual purity translated her into the emblem of racial purity.”⁶⁰ For women, accepting those values meant that they were denied any self-authority and activity; nevertheless, they readily accepted and internalized this. If there was a clash with the ideals of sacred Southern womanhood and their personal ideals they never questioned the system or the society that constructed these ideals, but rather they were searching for problem within themselves. As Lillian Smith notes in her novel *Killers of the Dream*: “They listened to the round words of men’s tribute to Sacred Womanhood and believed, thinking no doubt that if they were not sacred then what in God’s heaven was the matter with them!”⁶¹

The reason for this unanimous acceptance of values is the fact that the stereotype of the Southern Belle was justified upon several premises. Firstly, young women practically have no other way out of the system since they were kept in isolation from their birth. As Biljana Oklopčič explains: “The belle was placed in a kind of limbo: just as her mother was forced to accept the cultural role which denied her sexual and maternal identity, so too the belle had to deny her sexuality, and at the same time, perform passion without taking part in it.”⁶² As she was trapped in this enclosed circle, the Southern Belle during the antebellum period was not aware of the other possibilities that existed for her. Even if some of them saw outside the world and tried to live their lives accordingly they would risk rejection as well as being made to feel shame because of it. If a Southern Belle did not marry and remained a spinster she, unlike her “Northern sister of comparable education, could not even teach school without feelings of guilt and self-consciousness”⁶³

⁶⁰ Diane Roberts, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood* (Athens and London: The University of London Press, 1994) 102.

⁶¹ Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream* (New York: W.W: Norton, 1949) 137.

⁶² Biljana Oklopčič, “Southern Bellehood (De)Constructed: A Case Study of Blanche DuBois.” *Americana* 4.2 (2008) Web. 1.Apr.2015. <<http://americanajournal.hu/vol4no2/oklopccic>>

⁶³ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2007) 229.

Secondly, partaking in the creation of the Southern Belle was the question of prestige. It was a question of regional as well as group identity. The title of the Southern Belle was exclusively given only to upper class white Southern women. Giving her the identity of a Southern Belle, a young woman was distinguished not only from the other women in the South but also from other women in northern states that were believed by Southerners to be less aristocratic and lacked proper manners.

The end of the Civil War and subsequently the period of Reconstruction nevertheless gave voice to questioning the stratified and closely governed roles of women. The war called into question many of the assumptions Southerners had about the roles of women and heralded “an era of greater independence for women both in the public and private arenas”⁶⁴ which consequently put emphasis on the belle’s determinacy and strength. Later during the period of Reconstruction, the image of the Southern Belle was a personification of the South. Her suffering was connected with the suffering of the Confederacy’s wounded pride after its defeat. While the antebellum way of life was slowly dismantling in the postbellum South, Southern women, as Elizabeth Fox Genovese asserts were supposed to preserve “the closest possible facsimile of antebellum class and race relations”⁶⁵ She suggests that postbellum Southern Belles were made to stand as a “bulwark against social and racial chaos”⁶⁶ as white patriarchy experienced “the terror of losing jurisdiction over women’s bodies created discourses of nostalgia and threat.”⁶⁷ With the defeat of the Confederacy and the abolition of the institution of slavery white men now saw a threat in the black men who could now destroy the purity of their white women. Along with the fear of the black “rapist” there was also the internal fear that the ideal of ladyhood like it used to be might have gone awry. Thus, the corruption of the Southern Belle represented the corruption of the Old South: “Given that the Civil War was such a radical marker in the way southerners understood their history, it is

⁶⁴ Bettina Entzminger, *The Belle Gone Bad: White Southern Women Writers and the Dark Seductress*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002) 75.

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “The Awakening in the Context of the Experience, Culture and Values of Southern Women.” Cited in Bernard Koloski ed. *Approaches to Teaching Chopin’s The Awakening* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1988) 37.

⁶⁶ Fox-Genovese, 37.

⁶⁷ Diane Roberts, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood* (Athens and London: The University of London Press, 1994) 104.

inevitable that “ravishment” and sexual corruption be seen in historical terms, a romantic decline of “purity” and integrity from the mythologically intact past.”⁶⁸

The 1920s saw the emergence of female voice that started to get more prominent with women taking part in the work force after the First World War and the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment that gave women the right to vote. Women were allowed to get educated and as a consequence they started to enjoy economic and personal independence. In the South this development also brought a new perspective on the image of the Southern Belle. The 1920s was also the era of rebirth of literature in the South generally referred to as the Southern Renaissance. The Southern Renaissance, apart from bringing about a fresh literary art, also proclaimed a new critical introspection of traditional values. The image of the antebellum Southern Belle was thus challenged and deconstructed. The values that this myth incorporated - the insistence on physical beauty, passivity, submissiveness and asexuality contrived to create an unbearable strain for young women that were ultimately harmed by it. Quite specifically it was then asserted that:

Society[‘s] emphasis on the beauty of the belle can produce a selfishness and narcissism that cause her to ignore the development of positive aspects of her personality. Taught to see herself as a beautiful object, the belle accentuates only her appearance and is not concerned with any talents that do not contribute to the goal her society has chosen for her: winning a man. The sheltering of the belle leads to a harmful innocence: she cannot adequately interpret the behavior of men who do not believe in the code of southern chivalry that respects the purity of women. Moreover, the repression required by the “ethic of purity” which leads to a variety of physical and mental disorders, including frigidity and exaggerated subservience (is also condemned)⁶⁹

The reason why Kathryn Seidel is cited here at length is to show the fact that the subversion of the Southern belle stereotype from the antebellum period did not automatically mean the creation of her antithesis. This was due to the fact that the

⁶⁸ Roberts, 104.

⁶⁹ Kathryn Lee Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* (USA: University Press of Florida, 1985) 32.

prejudices against women's behavior were still deeply rooted in Southern culture. As Diane Roberts notes even though "southern women might be no longer be queens and saints, they were not allowed to be "flesh and blood or humans either"⁷⁰ The failure to respect this prescriptive code of behavior usually implied some kind of punishment – hysteria, madness, rape, losing social privileges.

⁷⁰ Roberts, 109.

4.2 William Faulkner and Southern Women

The critical debate on Faulkner's female characters generally revolves around Faulkner being accused of misogyny in his works. The main argument is based on the notable absence of the female voice in his novels and his myopic portrayal of women as either completely subjugated or predatory, evil characters. As Leslie Fiedler explains in *Love and Death in the American Novel*: "Faulkner has been accused of populating his fiction with mummies, and white women who fall into one of two cartoonish categories: great, sluggish, mindless daughters of peasants, whose fertility and allure are scarcely distinguishable from those of a beast in heat, and the febrile, almost fleshless but sexually insatiable daughters of the aristocracy."⁷¹

Grouping Faulkner's women into sexual and asexual, however, is something of an oversimplification. All his female characters, even though it would be easier to simply label them with one of the stock names that Faulkner seems to offer, should be seen in their social context to be more fully realized and understood. They must, of course, also be understood in their fictional context in which Faulkner distributes sympathy or antipathy towards his heroines as well as he shows their interaction with other characters to fully understand their motivations and behavior.

Among all the female characters that Faulkner uses in his works, the character of Southern Belle is the one that has a specific place in his canon. Kathryn Seidel has called the character of the Faulknerian Southern Belle "an unforgettable and recurring character" further arguing that his use of the Southern Belle archetype is unlike the other authors of the Southern Renaissance since Faulkner

creates a comprehensive vision by portraying an abundance of belles who live both in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Faulkner's belles represent the most self-conscious and comprehensive culmination of the long tradition of associating the belle and all her faults with the South. Faulkner's method in accomplishing these tasks is that of a historian; he studies the belle as an institution in the southern society⁷²

⁷¹ Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion Books, 1960) 320.

⁷² Seidel, 97.

When Faulkner wrote his fifth novel *Sanctuary* he said in his introduction to the Modern Library edition in 1932 that he was not proud of his original novel that was published in 1931. He said that the novel to him was “a cheap idea”⁷³ because “it was deliberately conceived to make money”⁷⁴ and it was “written in three weeks.”⁷⁵ He goes on to say that his publisher Harrison Smith wrote him immediately that he could not publish it because they “would both be in jail.”⁷⁶ Nevertheless, in his commentary on the differences between the original version of *Sanctuary* and its re-published version in 1932 Noel Polk, a Faulknerian scholar, reminds us that Faulkner might not be telling the complete truth about the text being just as effortless as Faulkner says. He notes that the “evidence from the holograph manuscript of *Sanctuary* makes it clear that the book was heavily revised by the author in the initial writing process, with the manuscript showing hundreds of shifts of material within it.”⁷⁷ Polk also calls to our mind that Faulkner, in the second revised version, switched the focus from his intended central character, Horace Benbow, to Temple Drake, a Mississippi debutante, who is kidnapped after a dance and is kept in the old country house known as Old Frenchman’s Place, a place that serves as a hangout for bootleggers. This shift from Horace Benbow to Temple Drake, according to Terrell Tebbets, marks Faulkner’s shift to the production of his most “feminine of novels”⁷⁸ filled with “active female characters.”⁷⁹ Indeed, the time when the character of Temple Drake was created was a time when, as it was mentioned previously, suffragists and women’s rights activists contested traditional views of the female as moral guardians and domestic servants. In the South, black and white women activists came together for major reform: led by Jessie Daniel Ames, these women launched an antilynching campaign.”⁸⁰ Even though Ames’s vision came probably too early to be introduced in the Southern context, nevertheless her “revolt against chivalry”⁸¹ had serious feminist implications including the issue of female agency and sexual politics. In addition, if

⁷³ William Faulkner, *Sanctuary* (New York: Vintage, 1993) 319.

⁷⁴ Faulkner, 320.

⁷⁵ Faulkner, 320.

⁷⁶ Faulkner, 320.

⁷⁷ Faulkner, 320.

⁷⁸ Terrell Tebbets, “Sanctuary, Marriage, and the Status of Women in 1920s America.” *The Faulkner Journal* 19 (Fall 2003), 47.

⁷⁹ Tebbets, 47.

⁸⁰ Carol Ruth Berkin, “Women’s Life” in *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, Charles Reagan Wilson, William Ferris eds. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989.) 1542.

⁸¹ Berkin, 1542.

we look at the creation of Temple Drake from the chronological perspective on Faulkner's works, here we mean the time setting of his works, not the date of their publication, we can see that Temple is a belle that appears as his later if not the last Southern Belle character. What Faulkner does with the archetype of the Southern Belle in *Sanctuary* is what Diane Roberts calls "Faulkner's final dismantling of a cultural icon, the Southern Belle."⁸²

Let us now move from the socio-historical and contextual perspective that was introduced in the beginning of this chapter toward a literary analysis of the archetype of Southern Belle personified in the character of Temple Drake in *Sanctuary*.

⁸² Roberts, 125.

4.3 Temple Drake

Temple Drake has been one of Faulkner's strongest and the most controversial female characters since the publication of *Sanctuary*, a source of many critical discussions. Early critics blamed Temple largely for her rape due to her reckless personality, provocative way of clothing and her conduct. David Williams, in his book *Women in Faulkner: The Myth and the Muse*, makes his claim that "Temple is carried off into virtual prostitution, meanwhile discovering that she has all along consented to it, even enjoyed it, and that her affinity for evil is absolute."⁸³ Another critic, Bettina Entzminger calls the character of Temple "a beautiful and willful coquette who takes great pleasure in cruelly manipulating her fraternity boyfriends"⁸⁴ and labels Temple as a character that "lacks psychological depth"⁸⁵ More recently, critics have questioned this judgment, seeing it as rooted in a rather abrupt and one-sided reading of such a complex character as Temple and have found her to be a victim of various social pressures that have caused her to adapt passively to situations rather than actively participate in them. Philip M. Wienstein, for example, claims that "usually dismissed as a nymphomaniac or a bitch who gets what she deserves, Temple actually suffers, during (the) extraordinary early chapters, as a fully-fledged Faulkner heroine"⁸⁶ It is interesting to note that by shifting the novel's focus of the female character Faulkner maybe diverted the attention from other, namely male characters and the judgment thus becomes biased. Notably, there is a rush to vilify Temple Drake as a promiscuous and, ultimately, evil character despite the fact that we never really learn much about her. Conversely, Popeye whose depiction and revealed personal history clearly make him a profoundly immoral and fiendish character somehow escapes this vilification.

The first time Temple Drake is introduced is in chapter four when a "faculty member or candidate for a master's degree"⁸⁷ is watching her as she gets into a car. This

⁸³ David Williams, *Women in Faulkner: The Myth and the Muse* (Montreal: McGill – Queen's Press, 1977) 142.

⁸⁴ Bettina Entzminger, *The Belle Gone Bad: White Southern Women Writers and the Dark Seductress* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002) 27.

⁸⁵ Entzminger, 27.

⁸⁶ Philip M. Weinstein, "Precarious Sanctuaries: Protection and Exposure in Faulkner's Fiction." *Studies in American Fiction* Vol.6 Issue 2 (1978): 180.

⁸⁷ Faulkner, 28.

image of Temple being watched by someone else is the image that echoes the beginning of the novel where Popeye is watching Horace Benbow as he is drinking from the spring. The characters are never directly introduced or described by the narrator in *Sanctuary* and the theme of voyeurism is one of the themes that run through the book. Therefore, when Temple is introduced, we are aware that she is the product of the looks of others, particularly male looks. Even if we would want to quit spying on Temple it is impossible since the narration makes her both the object of the male's (a male who is watching her) and the reader's gaze. The description focuses on particular areas of her body such as her legs that are described in a very suggestive and sexualized way. Temple is not only introduced here but also presented as an object of (male) desire. Her body is no longer described in the romanticized and innocent manner as the body of the Southern Belle in the antebellum period since now we are made complicit to look at the image of Temple's undergarment as she hops into the car:

Temple, a snatched coat under her arm and her long legs blonde with running, in a speeding silhouette against the lighted windows of the Coop, vanishing into the shadow beside the library wall, and perhaps a final squatting swirl of her knickers or whatnot as she sprang into the car waiting there with engine running on the particular night.⁸⁸

Here the image we are given is very suggestive; an erotic voyeuristic fantasy that Faulkner wants us to create. Nevertheless, what may initially look like a very suggestive appraisal of Temple's body is further transgressed into an extreme by naturalistic darkly grotesque portrayal. For example, later in the novel at Frenchman's Place when Temple is asking about the bathroom and is sent to the barn with a "few leaves of mail-order catalogue"⁸⁹ as a toilet paper where she can relieve herself privately, she discovers that she is being watched by a stranger hiding in the bush: "He was watching me all the time! ... He was there in the bushes watching me all the time."⁹⁰ Now, there is no wishful thinking of the narrator to catch a glimpse of Temple's underwear as she is hopping into the car. Temple is a different type of object for a different type of audience. As she moves from Oxford to Old Frenchman's place the spying becomes more aggressive. As Philip M. Weinstein

⁸⁸ Faulkner, 28.

⁸⁹ Faulkner, 90.

⁹⁰ Faulkner, 90-91.

points out: "Faulkner stresses in the ordeal of Temple the physicality of the body, the futility of locating values within it and insisting on it as an inviolable sanctuary."⁹¹ From this perspective, Faulkner freed the Southern Belle from her statue-like position by giving her the physicality of her body; however, he brings her physicality into extreme such as showing her while she performs bodily functions (excreting). In Southern literature, the physicality of the body is usually connected with the image of the black women that were believed to be sexual and sensual. They were also connected with bodily functions such as nurturing, childbearing or sex, activities that the white lady or belle was never taught to be perform, thus Temple's body here transgresses not only the boundaries of her class but also of her race.

Comparing Temple Drake with the character of Bel Tracy from *The Swallow Barn* we can clearly see the shift in these two Southern Belles. While Bel was living on a plantation that is described in pastoral imagery, isolated from the outside world and learning about it only through the historical romances of Sir Walter Scott, dreaming about the idealized cavalier that will appear in front of her one day Temple Drake is living in a town and staying on a university campus riding cars with town boys. Her image is no longer an image of a coy, demure and submissive virgin; Temple is bold, sexualized with her "bold painted mouth"⁹² and looking "cool, predatory and discreet"⁹³ She is no longer passive, she is aware of her body image and she likes being watched as she controls her milieu: "Her face was quite pale, dusted over with recent powder, her hair in spent red curls. Her eyes, all pupil now, rested upon them for a blank moment. Then she lifted her hand in a wan gesture, whether at them or not, none could have said."⁹⁴ Later in chapter four Temple's virtue is questioned when we learn through Gowan Stevens that her name is written on the lavatory wall: "...he leaned against the wall, swaying, and drooling, and read the name. Then he looked at them, wagging his head. "Girl name...Name the girl I know. Good girl. Good sport. Got date take her to Stark....Starkville. No chap'rone, see?"⁹⁵

Temple's name on the wall suggests that her reputation circles amongst men. Faulkner already foreshadows this earlier in the beginning of the fourth chapter when he describes Temple at the dance where she "passed in swift rotation from one pair of

⁹¹ Weinstein, 175.

⁹² Faulkner, 29.

⁹³ Faulkner, 29.

⁹⁴ Faulkner, 30.

⁹⁵ Faulkner, 34.

black sleeves to the next”⁹⁶ By not referring to the men as actual figures but only to their hands (sleeves) the image of Temple as an object to be handled from person to person is suggested. This image clashes with her name “Temple” that implies the southern ideal of sacred white womanhood perhaps most precisely expressed in W.J. Cash’s *Mind of the South*: “ Woman!!! The center and circumference, diameter and periphery, sine, tangent and secant of all our affections!”⁹⁷ Faulkner’s treatment of Temple here is ironic since she is no longer that untouchable and distant beauty on a pedestal, she is available to all men.

Even though Faulkner subverts Southern Belle mythology, still, there are parts of Temple’s description that remain stereotypical. Temple is, for example, the only daughter of her father, she has only brothers, towards the end of the novel we learn that she grew up without a mother, she is in her teen years (at the time when Popeye kidnaps her she is seventeen) a spirited and frantic girl. Indeed, her movements and gestures reflect her personality. In the first half of the novel her moves are described in similar terms to Bel Tracy in the *Swallow Barn*, who is very dynamic. Temple “springs into the car,”⁹⁸ “walk[s] swiftly,” “scrambles to her feet” and Faulkner repeatedly uses the word “savage” to describe her appearance as in “her mouth painted into savage and perfect bow”⁹⁹ Even though she does not live in an isolated plantation house as Bel Tracy did in *Swallow Barn*, Temple Drake is in Oxford, a place that is a controlled community where she still maintains her reputation because of her class. She maintains her purity, despite the fact that she hangs out with the town boys, because of class position that is secured through her father. Although prior to the court scene he had barely appeared in the novel, Temple is protected by her father’s prestige and power. She knows that when she says “My father is a judge!”¹⁰⁰ it will protect her from any violation and lets her experiment with her newly-found unrestricted sexual power. This freedom, however soon changes into dependence upon a young man already drunk, Gowan Stevens, with whom she ends up in a car accident and enters a completely different world than the one she has been living in.

⁹⁶ Faulkner, 29.

⁹⁷ W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*. (New York: Vintage, 1941) 98.

⁹⁸ Faulkner, 28.

⁹⁹ Faulkner, 208.

¹⁰⁰ Faulkner, 30.

In comparison to Temple's controlled and cool appearance at the Letter Club Dances her initiation into Old Frenchman's Place begins with her fall during the car accident:

She felt herself flying through the air, carrying a numbing shock upon her shoulder and a picture of two men peering from the fringe of cane at the roadside. She scrambled to her feet, her head reverted, and saw them step into the road, the one in the suit of tight black and straw hat, smoking cigarette, the other bareheaded, in overalls, carrying a shotgun, his bearded face gaped in slow astonishment. Still running her bones turned to water and she fell flat on her face, still running.¹⁰¹

The image of Temple as being unable to control her body foreshadows how her initiation into Popeye's world will happen, that she would try to escape initially but then becomes too terrified and catatonic that she is unable to make any move or any sound. After arriving at Goodwin's place, Temple does not understand yet, that she is no longer able to use her class privileges. When she notices that Tommy is watching her, "looking at her, at her belly and loins"¹⁰² she responds by lifting her thigh and "jerked her skirt down and sprang up"¹⁰³ so she is practicing her coquetry as with the town boys who are also looking at her in a similar manner. Ironically, Temple's first encounter with the real nature of the place and its surroundings is also initiated through her voyeuristic desire to look inside the old house. When she sees the old mansion with a "weed-choked slope and a huge barn, broken-backed, tranquil in sunny desolation"¹⁰⁴ which is evidently a reference to the state of plantation society and the forgotten plantation myth we can also predict what is going to happen to its most celebrated and guarded symbol, the Southern Belle. We see Temple Drake as she stumbles into trash:

She whirled again and without a break in her stride and still watching the old man, she ran right off the porch and fetched up on hands and knees in a litter of ashes and tin cans and bleached bones, and saw Popeye watching her from

¹⁰¹ Faulkner, 38.

¹⁰² Faulkner, 41.

¹⁰³ Faulkner, 41.

¹⁰⁴ Faulkner, 42.

the corner of the house, his hand in his pockets and a slanted cigarette curling across his face.¹⁰⁵

In attacking the plantation myth of the South and its chivalric code, Faulkner also destroys the myth of the white virginal Southern Belle. By leaving Temple Drake on her hands and knees among the bleached bones and tin cans Faulkner is symbolically throwing this icon into the trash letting it fall, together with the antebellum chivalry and the plantation myth.

Despite the fact that the Old Frenchman's Place is not far away from Jefferson from Faulkner's other-worldly description of the place we can already sense that Temple's previous "innocent ways,"¹⁰⁶ are not valid here anymore. Yet, Temple is still trying to cope with new surroundings by using her old ways. As Olga Vickery argues, Temple "attempts to persuade herself that the two worlds are identical, or if not, that hers has the power of control"¹⁰⁷ but unlike Gowan and the town boys, the men at Frenchman's Place are not interested in the social prominence and prestige of Temple's father, what is what they want is to satisfy their sexual desires without playing at courtship or any other cues with which they interpret their sexual intents. Ruby confirms this as she is educating her on what a real man means:

Man? You've never seen a real man. You don't know what is to be wanted by a real man. And thank your stars you haven't and you never will, for then you'd find just what that putty little face is worth, and all the rest of it you think you are jealous of when you're just scared of it.¹⁰⁸

Moreover, Temple has chosen Popeye as the man she attempts to charm with "a grimace of taut, toothed coquetry"¹⁰⁹ but he refuses even to talk to her: "Make your whore lay off me, Jack."¹¹⁰ As her previous experience with men has taught her to use her body as a currency but without being harmed she is not aware that Popeye does not recognize the act of coquetry. As Joseph R. Urgo explains: "At seventeen, she has not yet learned the power her body has over men, the power to make them uncontrollably desire her. She has, however, mastered the strategy of that power: the

¹⁰⁵ Faulkner, 43.

¹⁰⁶ Faulkner, 37.

¹⁰⁷ Olga Vickery, "Crime and Punishment: Sanctuary." *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Sanctuary: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. John Douglas Canfield. (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1982) 17.

¹⁰⁸ Faulkner, 59.

¹⁰⁹ Faulkner, 48.

¹¹⁰ Faulkner, 49.

scant dress, delicate shoe, painted mouth.”¹¹¹ Unfortunately, her body is what is desired and will be used at the Old Frenchman’s House and consequently in Memphis, as well. Symbolically, this is already revealed in the image of the old washed female undergarment. Whereas at the beginning of the novel we might catch a glimpse of Temple’s undergarment, now we see it on display drying in the sun “of faded pink silk”¹¹² which had been “washed until the lace resembled a ragged, fibre-like fraying of the cloth itself.”¹¹³ With Temple staying in Old Frenchman’s Place we can perceive her dignity and a sense of security being violated more and more. She is no longer wild and running but “crouching,” and “squatting against the wall” and her body seems to display almost a disembodied quality: “Temple leaned around the door, past his dim shape, her face wan, small ghost in the refracted light from the dining-room.”¹¹⁴ Or when Ruby and she are trying to find refuge, on their bare feet, they “moved like ghosts.”¹¹⁵ Temple’s ability to actively fight against the horrible situation which she became involved in is diminishing with every hour Temple stays at Old Frenchman’s place. As she begins to understand her position in this nightmarish scenario, she consciously tries to make herself smaller and becomes absolutely static:

Temple was sitting on the bed, her legs tucked under her, erect, her hands lying in her lap, her hat tilted on the back of her head. She looked quite small, her very attitude an outrage to muscle and tissue of more than seventeen and more compatible with eight or ten, her elbows close to her sides, her face turned upward the door against which a chair was wedged.¹¹⁶

All the men that Temple is trying to call to her protection are absent, like her father who she is trying to invoke in her “My father is a judge” mantra or fail pathetically (Gowan is the clearest example) and her inability to do something about her predicament reaches its climax in the rape scene where Temple screams: “Something

¹¹¹ Joseph R. Urgo, “Temple Drake’s Truthful Perjury: Rethinking Faulkner’s Sanctuary.” *American Literature* Vol. 55 No. 3 (Oct., 1983) 437.

¹¹² Faulkner, 43.

¹¹³ Faulkner, 43.

¹¹⁴ Faulkner, 66.

¹¹⁵ Faulkner, 82.

¹¹⁶ Faulkner, 69.

is going to happen to me. Something is happening to me! I told you it was!”¹¹⁷ Instead of perhaps trying to call for help or trying to defend herself, Temple is left with nothing. As Scott Yarbrough argues: Temple is made the voyeur of her own violation.”¹¹⁸

The rape scene can be analyzed at least from two perspectives. Firstly, the rape scene is the symbolic clash of two different social classes and of two historical periods of the South, the Old South and the New South. Temple, on the one hand represents the white socially prestigious and rich class, while on the other hand Popeye, is a gangster and a murderer who represents the outcasts. He is a class that, as Robert Moore explains, Temple’s society “labels and dismisses respectively... If they accept the system of paternalism, they accept it with their low status... these outcasts who inhabit the old Frenchman’s Place have long since chosen not to be bound within the structure of this society”¹¹⁹ The fact that Popeye violated Temple with a corncob can viewed as a symbolic image of the working-class (New South) society that has desecrated the precious temple of the all the Old South’s aristocratic ideals; sacred womanhood.

Another analysis of the rape scene, more relevant for our purposes is the process of Temple’s initiation into her identity as a Memphis prostitute. It is not, however, that Temple automatically creates and takes on this new identity. We can see that the day after Popeye rapes her, when she is on her way to Memphis with Popeye she is obviously in a state of shock, disoriented and disembodied:

Her hat was jammed onto the back of her head, her hair escaping beneath the crumpled brim in matted cloths. Her face looked like a sleep-walker’s as she swayed limply to the lurching of the car. She lurched against Popeye, lifting her hand in limp reflex. Without releasing the wheel he thrust her back with his elbow. “Brace yourself,” he said. “Come on now.”¹²⁰

As Faulkner provides us with very few moments in which Temple is presented through her internal focalization we cannot really see what is happening inside her head. Nevertheless, in the previous passages in the novel we can perceive her to be

¹¹⁷ Faulkner, 102.

¹¹⁸ Scott Yarbrough, “The Dark Lady: Temple Drake as a Femme Fatale.” *Southern Literary Journal*, Spring 31.2 (1999) 55.

¹¹⁹ Robert Moore, “Desire and Despair: Temple Drake’s Self-Victimization.” in *William Faulkner and Women*, Doreen Fowler and Ann Abadie eds. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985.) 127.

¹²⁰ Faulkner, 136.

checking her image in the mirror, as if she needed to control her image and how it is presented to others. As long as she can control her image she knows where she belongs and more importantly who she is. We can observe in the rape scene where she imagines that she is changing her appearance into a boy, then into a teacher and then she is an old white man. On her way to Memphis with Popeye she becomes haunted by the image of her blood that she thinks is all over her clothes. Her obsession with her blood staining her clothes is reinforced by the recurrent image of blood:

Temple gazed dully forward as the road she had traversed yesterday began to flee backward under the wheels as onto a spool, feeling her blood, feeling her blood seeping slowly inside her loins. She sat limp in the corner of the seat, watching the steady backward rush of the land-pines in opening vistas splashed with fading dogwood; sedge; fields green with new cotton and empty of any movement, peaceful as though Sunday were a quality of atmosphere, of light and shade-sitting with her legs close together, listening to the hot minute seeping of her blood, saying dully to herself, I'm still bleeding. I'm still bleeding.¹²¹

Temple is hysterical about her blood revealing that she has been tainted and thus she thinks that if someone sees her it will mean her exclusion from the status of white untainted Southern Belle. As Robert R. Moore says: "Temple perceives what has happened as a stain immediately visible to anyone from that innocent world. The rape has made her "incomprehensible" to the self she has assumed herself to be; she now sees herself as caught within a state of sin, alienated from community."¹²² In the same vein, he adds that "with the violation of the rape she loses her autonomy as a human being, becoming an extension of Popeye's will. The fear he engenders in her saps her spirit and reduces her to cowering impotence."¹²³ The abovementioned context can be perceived in the scene when Popeye is driving Temple to Memphis:

The bougainvillea against the veranda would be large as basketballs and lightly poised as balloons, and looking vacantly and stupidly at the rushing

¹²¹ Faulkner, 137.

¹²² Robert Moore, "Desire and Despair: Temple Drake's Self-Victimization." in *William Faulkner and Women*, Doreen Fowler and Ann Abadie eds. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985.) 130.

¹²³ Robert Moore, "Desire and Despair: Temple Drake's Self-Victimization." in *William Faulkner and Women*, Doreen Fowler and Ann Abadie eds. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985.) 129.

roadside Temple began to scream. It started as a wail, rising, cut suddenly off by Popeye's hand. With her hands lying on her lap, sitting erect, she screamed, tasting the gritty acidity of his fingers while the car slewed squealing in the gravel, feeling her secret blood. Then he gripped her by her back of her neck and she sat motionless, her mouth round and open like a small empty cave. He shook her head.¹²⁴

The imagery that Faulkner uses with Temple in this passage is very puppet-like, as if Popeye was fully controlling her body as he grips her by the back of her head like a puppet. Temple is passive, she barely moves, her hands placed on her lap suggest that she is paralyzed with fear even more than back in the Old Frenchman's Place where she was sitting on the bed with her hands on her lap and compared to a "papier-mâché Easter toys."¹²⁵ Faulkner, perhaps, wants to reinforce the image of Temple's catatonic state by contrasting it with a description of a setting, which is described as very peaceful and quiet "as though Sunday were a quality of atmosphere."¹²⁶ Later in the same scene, Popeye makes Temple confront herself by telling her to look at herself in the mirror on the windshield: "Shut it," he said, "shut it," gripping her silent. "Look at yourself. Here."¹²⁷ It is in this moment that Temple is finally able to confront her new identity and locate her sense of place in the world. After Popeye makes her face her image in the windshield mirror, she takes out her compact and starts to do the same routine as she did back in the Old Frenchman's Place - is fixing her hair and her makeup. Yet, her final identification with the "new Temple" is completed in her room in Memphis, when she looks in the mirror and sees her reflection:

When Minnie was gone Temple poured the two drinks into a tumbler and gloated over it, the glass shaking in her hands. She set it carefully away and covered it and ate her supper from the bed. When she finished, she lit a cigarette. Her movements were jerky; she smoked swiftly, moving about the room. She stood for a moment at the window, the shade lifted aside, then she

¹²⁴ Faulkner, 138.

¹²⁵ Faulkner, 69.

¹²⁶ Faulkner, 137.

¹²⁷ Faulkner, 138.

dropped it and turned into the room again, spying herself in the mirror.

She turned before it, studying herself, puffing at the cigarette.¹²⁸

Temple is no longer passively just looking at her image in the mirror as in the car scene. Now she is consciously enacting and “studying herself” in the mirror. Later in the same scene we can see that she is doing this several times, moving around the room and returning to check herself in the mirror. Nevertheless, the case is not that Temple succumbs to her identity as a Memphis prostitute and enjoys it; it is rather that after the trauma of rape, her identity as a Southern Belle was destroyed. Thus she enacts the identity of a Memphis prostitute because it is the only way she can reconstruct her sense of self since it is suggested that her looks and how she appears to others are equivalent to her sense of identity. This claim can be supported by Temple’s ability to adapt her demeanor and speech with whomever is around. With Gowan she is using her “innocent ways,” with Ruby’s baby she is cooing nonsense words: “What a cute little bu-ba-a-by,” just as with Popeye when she is calling him “daddy.” The fact that Temple is a kind of mimicking bird is pointed out by Ruby, earlier in the novel when she says: “You poor little gutless fool. Playing at it.”¹²⁹

Indeed, Faulkner uses the actual word, parrot in connection to Temple twice in the novel. First, in Memphis, when Temple is seducing Red, she is initially using very similar sentences that Popeye said to her when he caught her leaving the brothel to see Red and then in Grotto she is “murmuring to him in parrot-like underworld epithet”¹³⁰ The second scene takes place already in the courtroom where she is being questioned by the District Attorney and she stares at him “giving her parrot-like answers”¹³¹

It would seem that Temple will be finally given her voice and speak with one man that cares about her and wants to listen to her traumatic experience of rape: Horace Benbow. Horace visits Temple in her room in the Memphis brothel. However, when she tries to recount the specificities to him, he refuses to listen and labels her story as a product of “one of those chatty monologues which women carry on when they realize that they are on the center of the stage.”¹³² He thinks that she is telling her

¹²⁸ Faulkner, 229.

¹²⁹ Faulkner, 60.

¹³⁰ Faulkner, 239.

¹³¹ Faulkner, 286.

¹³² Faulkner, 216.

story with “actual pride, a sort of naïve and impersonal vanity”¹³³ as though “she were making it up.”¹³⁴ In her essay *Ravishing Belles: Rape and Resistance in *Flags in the Dust* and *Sanctuary** Diane Roberts analyzes this scene. She states that Temple:

does what a select few women in Faulkner’s fiction do overtly: she tells her own story. But no one listens-least of all Horace Benbow, a southern gentleman who fails to live up to the chivalric ideal ... Temple’s story tells of victimization, but also of an attempt to take control through the making of her own fiction. What we hear, listening to Temple is not a story of a masculine confrontation of “evil” in the body of the feminine, but a tangle of rape and (mis) representation obscuring the near destruction of a woman.¹³⁵

By the end of the novel, when she appears in the court, her mental state is profoundly damaged. She appears blank and disconnected, her eyes “blank and all pupil,”¹³⁶ her hands “lay motionless, palm-up on her lap,” she is gazing like a “drugged person,” and she sits “in her attitude of childish immobility.”¹³⁷ Her presence in the courtroom is emptied, she seems to be disembodied even as the narrative suggests. If Horace Benbow refused her to listen in the Memphis brothel, we are anticipating that the courtroom will let Temple tell her story. Yet, the courtroom fails to provide a safe environment for Temple again since as Duvall rightly notes “the courtroom is a male space”¹³⁸ in which there is no going outside of the system of patriarchy. Just as she was a product of looks in the Old Frenchman’s House, she is viewed as a commodity in the eyes of the people from her class who actually hide it behind the Old South myth of the chivalric jest of the good male citizen that has to protect “the most sacred affairs of that most sacred *thing* in life: womanhood”¹³⁹ (emphasis mine) Jefferson thus only becomes a reversal of Old Frenchman’s Place.

¹³³ Faulkner, 216.

¹³⁴ Faulkner, 216.

¹³⁵ Diane Roberts, *Faulkner and Southern Womanhood* (Athens and London: The University of London Press, 1994) 137.

¹³⁶ Faulkner, 289.

¹³⁷ Faulkner, 289.

¹³⁸ John N. Duvall, *Faulkner’s Marginal Couple: Invisible, Outlaw, and Unspeakable Communities*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990) 75.

¹³⁹ Faulkner, 284.

The final image of the novel shows Temple sitting beside her father in Luxemburg Gardens in Paris. The whole image that Faulkner offers in this scene is eminently static and lifeless:

Rich and resonant the brasses crashed and died in the thick green twilight, rolling over them in the rich sad waves. Temple yawned behind her hand, then she took out a compact and opened it upon a face in miniature sullen and disconnected and sad. Beside her, her father sat, his hands crossed on the head of his stick, the rigid bar of his mustache beaded with moisture like frosted silver. She closed the compact and from beneath her smart new hat she seemed to follow with her eyes the waves of music, to dissolve into the dying brasses, across the pool and the opposite semicircle of the trees where at somber intervals the dead tranquil queens in stained marble mused, and on into the sky lying prone and vanquished in the embrace of the season of rain and death.¹⁴⁰

The setting in Paris suggests that it is fall. There is nothing to see, everything seems dead and death indeed seems to be the central image of this scene. We see Temple opening her compact to look at herself but then she quickly closes it and her eyes are fixed on the statues that are “dead tranquil queens” just like her. Faulkner thus leaves us with a fitting image of Temple as a marble effigy that has never been allowed to be herself without any restraints imposed on her by the society she lives in. Perhaps Anne Goodwin Jones is right when she says that “it seems impossible for Faulkner to imagine a conclusion that is not, however agonizing it may be, tragic for these women who resist the Southern patriarchal sex-gender system”¹⁴¹ Yet, it must be said that by creating the character of Temple Drake, Faulkner certainly foreshadows the struggles for female identity in Southern society.

¹⁴⁰ Faulkner, 317.

¹⁴¹ Anne Goodwin Jones, *Tomorrow is Another Day: The Women Writers in the South, 1859-1936*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981) 71.

5. What has become of you, Southern Belle?

5.1 Margaret Mitchell and *Gone with the Wind*

“Years ago, we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the War came and made the ladies into ghosts. So what else can we do, being gentlemen, but listen to them being ghosts?”¹⁴²

William Faulkner was undoubtedly the major writer to emerge from the Southern Renaissance and without any question one of the greatest American writers of the twentieth century. However, when his novel *Absalom, Absalom!* (from which the introductory quote is taken) was published in 1936, it was overshadowed by the publication of another’s, whose text reached more readers than Faulkner, if not all the major writers of the Southern Renaissance altogether, and has done more to shape the public image of the South than any other writer who was tackling it. The author was Margaret Mitchell and her most famous first, and also last, novel *Gone with the Wind*.

Allegedly a “housewife in Atlanta”¹⁴³ and a “former newspaper woman”, as her obituary issued in New York Times called her, she hoped for a sale of five thousands copies. Instead, fifty thousands copies were sold instantly on the day its publication and it quickly went out of print, making *Gone with the Wind* the best-selling novel of the twentieth century. In 1939 the novel was made into an equally successful movie that won nine Academy Awards. Despite the fact that the movie has been classified as quite faithful in its rendering, Hollywood production left out a lot from Mitchell’s original text. Nearly every critic who has discussed the relation between the movie and the novel has pointed out the changes made to the story. Yet, perhaps more importantly, the thing that remains the same is the main character of Scarlett O’Hara, a strong and willful woman who is able to do anything to survive.

Mitchell thus wants Scarlett to be opposite of what Faulkner suggests in the *Absalom, Absalom!*; she refuses to make her yet another ghost. Faulkner, as we have seen in the previous chapter of this thesis, devoted many of his works to the character of the

¹⁴² William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Vintage, 1995) 10.

¹⁴³ “Miss Mitchell, 49, Dead of Injuries,” *The New York Times*, August 17, 1949. Web. 25. Apr. 2015
< <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/1108.html> >

Southern Belle and she is a recurrent theme in his novels. Yet, as Bettina Entzminger correctly points out, he treats his Southern Belles as “an anachronism-no longer viable yet refusing to die.”¹⁴⁴ Women writers of the Southern Renaissance, where Margaret Mitchell also belonged, saw the figure of the Southern Belle as especially problematic. She was made to represent the South’s defeated past, but she was also an emblem that these women were still expected to embody, thus their experience was more immediate. As Anne Goodwyn-Jones observes in her book, *Tomorrow is Another Day* in which she deals with woman writers in the South, of all the writers that she focuses on, namely Augusta Evans, Grace King, Kate Chopin, Mary Johnston, Ellen Glasgow, Frances Newman and Margaret Mitchell, all “were raised to be southern ladies, physically pure, fragile, and beautiful, socially dignified, gracious, within the family sacrificial and submissive, yet, if the occasion required, intelligent and brave.”¹⁴⁵ That those authors were born in different eras seems to have made no difference in their upbringing or in the social roles they were expected to play.

In the character of Scarlett women can find a person that they can identify with, she is not an image of a woman that can be traditionally seen in that era, she is not kept in a limbo of perpetual childhood as the previous Southern Belles - we can see her journey that starts when she is sixteen-year old girl, to the end, when she is twenty-eight. As Molly Haskell notes in her book *Frankly, My Dear* in Scarlett “the tinkling charms of a Southern-belle saga are the rumblings of a feminist manifesto.”¹⁴⁶

By being both an active rebel against old patriarchal stereotypes about Southern women, and at the same time not letting anything or anyone stand in her way, Scarlett became the most celebrated and most vilified Southern Belle in the Southern culture.

¹⁴⁴ Bettina Entzminger, *The Belle Gone Bad: White Southern Women Writers and the Dark Seductress* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2002) 79.

¹⁴⁵ Anne Goodwyn-Jones, *Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981) 23.

¹⁴⁶ Molly Haskell, *Frankly My Dear: Gone with the Wind revisited* (New Haven&London: Yale University Press, 2009) 225.

5.2 Scarlett O'Hara

We are introduced to Scarlett at the beginning of the novel, where she is a sixteen-year-old Southern Belle sitting on the porch of Tara, her father's plantation:

Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful, but men seldom realized it when caught by her charm as the Tarleton twins were. In her face were too sharply blended the delicate features of her mother, a Coast aristocrat of French descent, and the heavy ones of her florid Irish father. But it was an arresting face, pointed chin, square of jaw. Her eyes were pale green without touch of hazel, starred with bristly black lashes and slightly tilted at the ends. Above them, her thick black brows slanted upward, cutting a startling oblique line in her magnolia-white skin-that skin so prized by Southern women and so carefully guarded with bonnets, veils and mittens against hot Georgia suns.¹⁴⁷

In the description of Scarlett's appearance Mitchell works with the traits traditionally employed by antebellum writers. In emphasizing Scarlett's charm over her physical beauty Mitchell seems to echo the description of Bel Tracy from the classic plantation novel "Swallow Barn" that also had features that "would not stand a critical examination"¹⁴⁸ however, it is her charm and the way she is able to act out her femininity that make her attractive. The image of Scarlett's flawed and imperfect beauty is thus working similarly as in case of Bel Tracy, but in a different time period and for different women. Scarlett is not absolutely beautiful, thus women can identify with her more closely because she could be one of them. It is the old-age reassurance in the power, not just of cosmetics and dress sense, but also and above all that "charm" and feminine "wiles" is a way to balance the possible lack of beauty. Yet, between Kennedy's and Mitchell's depiction of Southern Belle is a great difference. Whereas Kennedy, who constructed his character for the women that were sheltered by the sphere of domesticity precisely because he replicates the antebellum ideology, Mitchell subverts it by creating a woman that is a leader in her own right. Mitchell herself, the product of the Jazz age, constructs Scarlett for a different audience, and as we will see later in this chapter, despite the initial similarities with Bel Tracy, Scarlett is also a very different type of Southern Belle.

¹⁴⁷ Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (New York: Avon Books, 1973) 5.

¹⁴⁸ John Pendleton Kennedy, *Swallow Barn*; or, A Sojourn in The Old Dominion (Philadelphia: J.B.Lippincott, 1860) 8.

Even though there are similarities between Kennedy's depiction of Bel Tracy and Mitchell's Scarlett O'Hara still, Mitchell, through little details, creates a belle that is unconventional. For example, in contrast to Kennedy's description, Mitchell presents a very detailed and vivid picture of Scarlett's face and features. While Bel Tracy from Kennedy's description appears more like a female stock character since the description is focused only on her skin, eyes and mouth described in a very conventional manner, in Mitchell's portrayal of Scarlett we can perceive many little details such as "bristly black lashes"¹⁴⁹ or brows that "cut a startling oblique line."¹⁵⁰ By focusing on more details Mitchell gives us a belle who is becoming more believable, more realistic. Also, by describing Scarlett as having features inherited from her mother, who is a part of aristocracy, and features inherited from her father Mitchell already foreshadows that Scarlett is not going to be a conventional type of belle as it might appear. Scarlett's description as being a result of the mingling of the two classes -aristocracy represented by her mother and immigrants represented by her father -Mitchell is also suggesting that Scarlett will be in conflict with the old and the new South. As Kathryn Seidel notes: "It is a technique that Mitchell uses masterfully throughout the novel; with it she compliments her audience's knowledge of and affection for the stereotype, but uses it for her own purposes."¹⁵¹

These dichotomies between the traditional image of the Belle and new Belle continue in Scarlett's description of clothes. Although she is raised in the Southern tradition of idealization of feminine beauty that objectifies women and demands that they have to be appropriately decorated "in order to sell well"¹⁵², as we can see in Mitchell's description of Scarlett's "dress set off to perfection"¹⁵³ and the "demureness of hair netted smoothly into a chignon"¹⁵⁴, Mitchell also immediately adds that Scarlett distances herself from the traditional image of femininity:

Her green eyes in the carefully sweet face were turbulent, willful, lusty with life, distinctly at variance with her decorous demeanor. Her manners had been

¹⁴⁹ Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (New York: Avon Books, 1973) 5.

¹⁵⁰ Mitchell, 5.

¹⁵¹ Kathryn Lee Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1985) 54.

¹⁵² Biljana Oklopčić, "Southern Bellehood (De)Constructed: A Case Study of Blanche DuBois." *Americana* 4.2 (2008) Web. 1.Apr.2015. <<http://americanajournal.hu/vol4no2/oklopccic>>

¹⁵³ Mitchell, 5.

¹⁵⁴ Mitchell, 5.

imposed upon her by her mother's gentle admonitions and the sterner discipline of her mammy; her eyes were her own."¹⁵⁵

Just as Mitchell distances Scarlett from the traditional image of the passive and fragile belle she also debunks the myth of the aristocrats and their families as being the well-educated, spoiled and passive people who are unable to do anything except play cards and ride horses, and reveals the prejudices that Southerners had among themselves:

Although born to the ease of plantation life, waited on hand and foot since infancy, the faces of the three on the porch were neither slack nor soft. They had the vigor and alertness of country people who have spent all their lives in the open and troubled their heads very little with dull things in books. Life in the north Georgia county of Clayton was still new and, according to the standards of Augusta a little crude... but here in the north Georgia the lack of the niceties of classical education carried no shame, provided man was smart in things that mattered.¹⁵⁶

Furthermore, Mitchell questions a traditional Southern Belle's skill in artistry. Bel Tracy in *Swallow Barn* loves singing and wherever she goes she always has a quote ready from the historical romances that she is reading. Scarlett, despite the fact she attended a prominent university for women "Fayetteville Female Academy,"¹⁵⁷ had not "willingly opened a book since."¹⁵⁸ She displays no artistic talents. Scarlett lives in the new world, where making money is the primary interest. Even though her beauty, mysteriousness and danger that surrounds her personality make her an excellent subject for the artist, her pragmatism and materialism make her far removed from artistic vision. In fact, throughout the novel, the narrator makes numerous references to Scarlett's inability to be philosophical or artistic. This fact is revealed as soon as the second chapter of the novel where the narrator describes her as "forthright and simple as the wind blew over Tara"¹⁵⁹ and goes on to comment that "to the end of her days she would never be able to think complexly."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Mitchell, 5.

¹⁵⁶ Mitchell, 6.

¹⁵⁷ Mitchell, 7.

¹⁵⁸ Mitchell, 7.

¹⁵⁹ Mitchell, 29.

¹⁶⁰ Mitchell, 29.

What is perhaps the most radical change in Mitchell's character of the Southern Belle is the fact that her belle has a voice. Whereas Temple Drake's voice in *Sanctuary* is limited, most of the time drowned out by prevalent masculine voices, and Bel Tracy in *Swallow Barn* speaks of only what her Walter Scott's novels say to her or simply does not talk. Scarlett O'Hara, on the other hand, talks. Perhaps what is more important, Mitchell also permits us to see Scarlett's inner voice that works as a medium through which she subverts and criticizes socially prescribed roles for women. The bellehood for Scarlett is thus only a surface form of behavior as we can see from numerous passages in the novel. She has mastered the demeanor of the belle, the small part of being a perfect woman devoted to catching a husband and keeping all other suitors dangling on a string. She knows the tricks and uses them frequently.

For example as she is talking to Tarleton twins:

Scarlett made a mouth of bored impatience. If you say "war" just once more, I'll go in the house and shut the door. I've never gotten so tired of any one word in my life as "war," unless it's "secession." Pa talks war morning, noon and night, and all the gentlemen who come to see him shout about Fort Sumter and about States' Rights and Abe Lincoln till I get so bored I could scream! And that's all the boys talk about too, that and their old Troop. There hasn't been any fun at the party this spring because the boys can't talk about anything else. I 'm mighty glad Georgia waited till after Christmas before it seceded or it would have ruined the Christmas parties, too. If you say "war" again, I'll go in the house. She meant what she said, for she could never long endure any conversation of which she was not the chief subject. But she smiled when she spoke, consciously deepening her dimple and fluttering her bristly black lashes as swiftly as butterflies' wings. The boys were enchanted, she intended them to be, and they hastened to apologize for boring her.¹⁶¹

Here Scarlett, true to her Southern bellehood, rejects any discussion of politics, threatening (by the very appropriate feminine gesture that she will go in the house and shut the door) yet what her thoughts reveal is that this is a performance Scarlett already planned because she knows it will work. She is not really concerned with

¹⁶¹ Mitchell, 8.

what is she saying since what is more important, it seems, is the way she says it and how she can act it out. This argument is later acknowledged by the narrator when she notes that Scarlett's role, even though she plays the role of the belle to perfection, is based on the acknowledged and universal rules of society that she lives in: "She knew only that if she did or said thus-and-so, men would unerringly respond with the complementary thus-and-so. It was like a mathematical formula and no more difficult, for mathematics was the one subject that had come easy to Scarlett in her schooldays."¹⁶²

As the novel develops, Scarlett's criticism becomes more urgent. For instance, in the morning before the barbeque when Mammy helps her with her dress Scarlett realizes the artificial behavior girls are supposed to exhibit and scorns it:

I'm tired of everlastingly being unnatural and never doing anything I want to do. I'm tired of acting like I don't eat more than a bird after a waltz, when I could dance for two days and never get tired. I'm tired of saying, "How wonderful you are!" to fool men who haven't got one-half sense I've got, and I'm tired of pretending I don't know anything, so men can tell me things and feel important while they're doing it.¹⁶³

Mitchell thus shows Scarlett as a complex and quite enigmatic character. On one hand she is bound by social conventions to act out her role as a Belle, yet on the other hand she rebels against these norms that make her unable to be who she really wants to be. Just like in her face, there is a clash of cultures, the aristocratic and the immigrant and Scarlett struggles against her desire to be natural and the necessity to play a role of Southern belle. This conflict ultimately runs through the whole novel and it stems from Scarlett's relationship with her mother, Ellen.

Unlike previous Southern motherless belles that have been analyzed, Scarlett has a mother that she considers to be her role-model. It is noted earlier in the novel that all women, including her two sisters, have been natural enemies to Scarlett since they were pursuing the same goal - a man. The only exception is Scarlett's mother Ellen:

¹⁶² Mitchell, 63.

¹⁶³ Mitchell, 81.

Ellen O'Hara was different, and Scarlett regarded her as something holy and apart from all the rest of humankind. When Scarlett was a child, she had confused her mother with the Virgin Mary, and now that she was older she saw no reason for changing her opinion. To her, Ellen represented the utter security that only Heaven or a mother can give. She knew that her mother was the embodiment of justice, truth, loving tenderness and profound wisdom-a great lady. Scarlett wanted very much to be like her mother. The only difficulty was that being truthful and tender and unselfish, one missed most of the joys of life, and certainly many beaux.¹⁶⁴

All explicit references to Ellen, including Scarlett's, are positive. Scarlett admires her mother and respects her. Yet, all the indirect references to Scarlett's mother suggest that she has not been always present and caring mother. Rather, she appears as strict, distant and not very supportive of Scarlett's desire to be natural. In the scene where Scarlett meets with Mrs. Tarleton before the barbeque at Seven Oaks, Scarlett observes how she interacts with her daughters:

Scarlett laughed with the rest of at these sallies but, as always, the freedom with which the Tarletons treated their mother came as a shock. They acted as if she were one of themselves and a day over sixteen. To Scarlett, the very idea of saying such things to her mother was almost sacrilegious. And yet-and yet-there was something very pleasant about the Tarleton girls' relations with their mother, and they adored her for all that they criticized and teased and scolded her. Not, Scarlett loyally hastened to tell herself, that she would prefer a mother like Mrs. Tarleton to Ellen, but still it would be fun to romp with a mother.¹⁶⁵

One of the reasons that Scarlett feels isolated from her mother is the fact that Ellen has been raised in times when women were taught to repress their emotions and passions. In the passage of the novel that is dedicated to the history of Ellen we learn that she was infatuated with a young cousin whom her family prevented her from marrying. When he left he "took the glow that was in Ellen's heart"¹⁶⁶ and since then she became the respectable and perfect example of a Southern lady having little of her emotional substance to give to Scarlett and those she cares for. On the surface

¹⁶⁴ Mitchell, 63.

¹⁶⁵ Mitchell, 89.

¹⁶⁶ Mitchell, 44.

Mitchell shows that Scarlett respects her mother and respects the tradition of great ladies who work hard and keep quiet. Yet, Mitchell also shows that there is an emotional abyss between the two women and that Scarlett is unable to bridge their differences. Thus, symbolically, when Ellen dies, she dies at the crucial moment, at the war's end before Scarlett returns to Tara. The death of Ellen can be interpreted as Mitchell's intention to convey the message that the antebellum ideals of womanhood that she represented must be abandoned. As Bettina Entzminger says: "By killing off the stifling stereotype, the women writers purge the negative images unintentionally perpetuated by literary foremothers."¹⁶⁷ Ellen's death also establishes Scarlett's initiation into her own version of womanhood as well as emphasizes the necessity of her self-sufficiency and independence.

Together with the plantation lady, the plantation mansion falls, as it is captured in the image of a desolated Tara when Scarlett first sees it. In the imagery, Mitchell employs the elements of the Southern Gothic genre. As Scarlett is heading home from Atlanta, she passes the MacIntosh house:

She dimly discerned a sight which had grown familiar through terrible day-two tall chimneys, like granite tombstones towering above the ruined second floor, and broken unlit windows blotching the walls like still, blind eyes. Scarlett's taut nerves almost cracked as a sudden noise sounded in the underbrush near them. Prissy screamed loudly, throwing herself on the floor of the wagon, the baby beneath her... and Wade covered his eyes and cowered, too frightened to cry. Then the bushes beside them crashed apart under heavy hooves and a low moaning bawl assaulted their ears. ... "It's a ghos," moaned Prissy, writhing face down on the wagon boards. But, as Scarlett, though herself frightened, realizes, "It's only a cow"¹⁶⁸

More notably, it is the vision of another house that brings about a turning point for Scarlett. When she sees Twelve Oaks, the house of Ashley, "the charred remains of that once stately home which had crowned the hill in the white-columned dignity,"¹⁶⁹ she realizes how much the past has been devastated. Initially "too sick at the sight to

¹⁶⁷ Bettina Entzminger, *The Belle Gone Bad: White Southern Women Writers and the Dark Seductress* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2002) 30.

¹⁶⁸ Mitchell, 393.

¹⁶⁹ Mitchell, 392.

go on,”¹⁷⁰ she falls faint and lies with “her face in the dirt...remembering things and people that were dead, remembering a way of living that was gone forever.”¹⁷¹ For Scarlett, the image also brings a kind of catharsis as she finally decides not to look back:

When she arose at last and saw again the black ruins of Twelve Oaks, her head was raised high and something that was youth and beauty potential tenderness had gone out of her face forever. What was past was past. ... Throughout the South for fifty years there would be bitter-eyed women who looked backward, to dead times, to dead men, evoking memories that hurt and were futile, bearing poverty with bitter pride because they had those memories. But Scarlett was never to look back.¹⁷²

As she turns her back on the image of desolated Twelve Oaks she also symbolically turns her back on the ideals that the house represented. She sees that the antebellum ideals that are almost paralyzing in the description will no longer have place in the new South. She refuses to remain passive and dependent on others, especially patriarchy since she sees how it ended. Even though she realizes that she will have a hard time taking care of her sisters and her father, pride will not allow her to send them away. She is determined to find a way. Scarlett certainly wanted to cry but, “crying was so useless now. The only time crying ever did any good was when there was a man around from whom you wished favors.”¹⁷³

Scarlett’s perseverance and her ability to adapt to the new conditions ultimately makes her a non-traditional Southern belle that violates the boundaries of prescribed Southern femininity, and thus she is able to liberate herself from the conditions that oppressed her.

¹⁷⁰ Mitchell,392.

¹⁷¹ Mitchell,392.

¹⁷² Mitchell,419-421.

¹⁷³ Mitchell,438.

5.3 Melanie Wilkes

If Scarlett represents the new South and the progress, the female character that represents the disappearing Old Southern code is Melanie Wilkes. Melanie and Scarlett are polar opposites. With her traditional values as loyalty, commitment and honor Melanie stands in a perfect complementary position to Scarlett and her egotism, pragmatism and narcissism. Kathryn Lee Seidel distinguishes this dichotomy in the representation of the Southern Belle character when she states: “Where one is sweet, the other is sensual; where one is praised for her virtue and beauty, the other is narcissistic and vice-ridden”¹⁷⁴

The two main female characters of *Gone with the Wind* differ not only in their values and attitudes but also in their appearance. Whereas Scarlett is dressed in dark “green muslin dress”¹⁷⁵ and we can usually see her dressed in the dark colors throughout the novel, Melanie is dressed in a “grey organdie dress.”¹⁷⁶ The color symbolism also foreshadows that green, connected with Scarlett is the color of renewal, energy and rebirth, which stands for the new South. Grey, on the other hand is the color that is controlled, associated with maturity and the color that is stable and thus can be connected with the image of the old South. When referring to Melanie, the narrator describes her figure as “tiny, frailly built girl, who gave the appearance of a child masquerading to her mother’s enormous hoop skirts-an illusion that was heightened by the shy, almost frightened look in her large brown eyes.”¹⁷⁷ (103-104) Melanie appears almost like something supernatural with her fragile figure and big eyes. Ashley Wilkes, when mentioning Melanie, also suggests this image when he refers to Melanie as “the gentlest of dreams and a part of my dreaming”¹⁷⁸ (519) Melanie thus becomes a ghost, a shadow of the past come to life in a fragile frame. As the novel develops Melanie, unlike Scarlett, does not undergo any changes and essentially remains the same. After the Civil War she is one of the last remaining icons of the past. Upon Melanie’s return to Atlanta the narrator states:

¹⁷⁴ Kathryn Lee Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1985) xiv.

¹⁷⁵ Mitchell, 5.

¹⁷⁶ Mitchell, 104.

¹⁷⁷ Mitchell, 103-104.

¹⁷⁸ Mitchell, 519.

Melanie was young but she had in her all the qualities this embattled remnant prized, poverty and pride in poverty, uncomplaining courage, gaiety, hospitality, kindness and above all, loyalty to all the old traditions. Melanie refused to change, refused to even admit that there was any reason to change in a changing world. Under her roof the old days seemed to come back again... ¹⁷⁹

Scarlett is frequently compared to Atlanta, the city that “was born the same year she was christened”¹⁸⁰ or “Savannah and Charleston had the dignity of their years... But Atlanta was of her own generation, rude with the crudities of youth and as headstrong and impetuous as herself”.¹⁸¹ Just as the city of Atlanta is changing, Scarlett is changing as well. Melanie, on the contrary, refuses to change even though she knows that all the cultural values that she embraces have already passed away.

By symbolizing aspects of the past through the characterization of Melanie and contrasting those traits through the characterization of Scarlett, Mitchell addresses the issue of the revision of the Southern tradition, especially the position of women in the Southern society and the question of female identity.

Although the novel describes mostly the ways in which the perspective of Melanie and Scarlett are in opposition to each other, there are also some moments when they converge. Such is the episode that describes how Melanie and Scarlett live in Tara together, and organize and help each other. Their relationship brings them empowerment and security for a while. While Scarlett brings the food to the table, Melanie provides comfort to Scarlett’s sisters and her son, if not Scarlett herself. At first, Scarlett is “irritated” by Melanie’s “gentle hardihood”¹⁸² but a couple of pages later Scarlett’s attitude toward Melanie grows in a new direction. In the scene where Scarlett shoots a Yankee intruder:

Melanie’s eyes took in the scene below in its entirety, the sprawling blue-clad body in the red pool the sewing box beside him, Scarlett, barefooted and gray-faced, clutching the long pistol. In silence her eyes met Scarlett’s. There was

¹⁷⁹ Mitchell, 725.

¹⁸⁰ Mitchell, 142.

¹⁸¹ Mitchell, 140.

¹⁸² Mitchell, 430.

a glow of grim pride in her usually gentle face, approbation and a fierce joy in her smile that equaled the fiery tumult in Scarlett's own bosom. "Why-why-she's like me! She understands how I feel!" thought Scarlett for a long moment. "She'd have done the same thing! With a thrill she looked up the frail swaying girl she for whom she had never any feelings but the dislike and contempt. Now struggling against hatred for Ashley's wife, there surged feeling of admiration and comradeship. She saw in a flash of clarity untouched by any petty emotion that beneath the gentle voice and dovelike eyes Melanie there was a thin flashing blade of unbreakable steel, felt too that there were banners and bugles of courage in Melanie's blood."¹⁸³

Perhaps Scarlett is more active in her rebelling against the stereotypical conduct of the Southern belle, yet as we can see in this scene Melanie also subverts the gender expectations for the Southern lady. Even though fragile and loyal to her old values she also shares a survival instinct with Scarlett and is not entirely passive and submissive, as it might initially seem. However, this quality of Melanie seems to work only when she is with Scarlett. As soon as she returns to Ashley, symbolically the representative of the Old South she dies, because Melanie, though equally strong female character, lacks the energy that is necessary in order to survive in the new world.

¹⁸³ Mitchell, 434.

6. Conclusion

When mentioning the Southern Belle there is, in terms of general public, one name that comes inevitably to mind – Scarlett O’Hara. The main female protagonist of Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* became the quintessential representative of the Southern Belle if not the representative of the white Southern woman. Nevertheless, the depictions of the Southern Belle are not and should not be limited solely to Scarlett O’Hara. Though the archetype of the Southern Belle is the creation of the antebellum culture an important shift in her meaning and function appears with the end of the Civil War with her image ever recurrent and evolving in historical and fictional texts up to the present.

While the discussion of the Southern Belle in the literary history could cover a wide array of authors and works I have chosen only particular texts since I wanted to show the historical continuum for my analysis. The works I discussed and analyzed demonstrate a chronological progression within Southern literature, beginning with John Pendleton Kennedy’s *Swallow Barn* (1832) then continuing to William Faulkner’s *Sanctuary* (1932) and finally Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* (1936). The passing of time is deeply significant in this discussion since it shows how the archetype of the Southern Belle is represented and transformed in the Southern memory and culture. Moreover, these authors and novels demonstrate a variation of backgrounds as well as perspectives and genders.

During the antebellum era the American South was idealized and romanticized. Literary tradition was predominantly based on the romantic fiction such as Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*, which was widely popular during the antebellum era. The Southern system of honor sought to replicate the imaginary world of lords and ladies spun by these tales.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, just as the literary tradition was informed by the European tradition so did the Southern Belle become the copy of the Victorian white, pure virgin: young, beautiful or almost beautiful, charming, vivacious and most importantly on a constant hunt for a husband. As explained in Alexis Girardin Brown’s article that explores the transformation of the Southern Belle, “The Southern belle of the pre-Civil War era is an enduring image, encompassing visions of

¹⁸⁴ Barbara C. Ewell, Pamela Glenn Menke eds., *Southern Local Color: Stories of Region, Race, and Gender* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002) 31.

delicacy, gentility, and hospitality within the domestic sphere of the household.”¹⁸⁵ Thus, in the antebellum ideology, the dichotomous gender constructions in which women embraced the private sphere of household whereas men operated in the public sphere of business and politics took a prominent place. John Pendleton Kennedy’s novel *Swallow Barn* also presupposes this orderly sequence by which women (as well as men) are led into socially accepted gender roles. Bel Tracy, the main female protagonist of the novel, is the character of the Southern Belle that relies heavily on the literary convention of Kennedy’s era and milieu. Her purpose is to be prized less for her beauty and more for her virtue. Kennedy - as well as other antebellum male writers - is not interested in women since women were excluded from the patriarchal plantation myth. As a result, Bel Tracy is a flat character, lacking psychological depth and living in a state, which Adrienne Rich called the “perpetual childhood.”¹⁸⁶

In the post-Civil War era, the Southern Belle’s adherence to a Victorian ideal in an ever-progressing world allowed the defeated and sentimental South an outlet for its desperation about rapidly diminishing ideals of an always lost culture. Consequently, this creates a dilemma: a character that represents the ideals and customs of the bygone era facing the realities of a new era. Therefore, just as most roles have to adapt with the times, even the antebellum Southern Belle is a different character from its predecessor. As Anne Goodwyn-Jones elaborates in the postbellum era “writers refusing to use in their own analyses a timeless ahistorical model of fixed gender differences that replicates the ideology they are overturning.”¹⁸⁷

The collapse of the virtuous Victorian Southern Belle is dramatized in the character of William Faulkner’s Temple Drake from *Sanctuary*. In comparison to Pendleton, Faulkner’s fiction revises the popular and populist rhetoric produced by the antebellum era. Faulkner’s novel shows an increasingly progressive outlook for Southern femininity as he provides his female character mobility, yet he shows how the woman who resists the patriarchal gendered roles is punished by the total loss and disintegration of her identity. This interpretation establishes the connection with

¹⁸⁵ Alexis Girardin Brown, “The Women Left Behind: Transformation of the Southern Belle, 1840-1880” *Historian* Vol.62 No.4 (June 2000) 759

¹⁸⁶ Adrienne Rich, “Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson.” *Parnassus Review* Vol. 5 No.1 (1976) Web. 29 Mar. 2015 < <http://parnassusreview.com/archives/416>>

¹⁸⁷ Anne Goodwyn Jones, *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts* (USA: The University Press of Virginia, 1997) 7.

Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* in which de Beauvoir examines how women understand themselves, their relationships, their place in society, and the construction of gender.

Famously, de Beauvoir starts writing *The Second Sex* after trying to write about herself and found the only way to start was to write that, "I am a woman."¹⁸⁸ Trying to understand what the idea of woman is she further questions this formulation, since she feels that man would never start a text with a formulation that he is a man:

A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man. The terms masculine and feminine are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both, the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity... Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as a relative to him.¹⁸⁹

This statement brings us to Temple Drake whose failure/inability to act is primarily based on her fear and dependency on men to do things for her. Firstly, she is defined through her father who is a judge, then in the Old Frenchman's place she is dependent on Gowan Stevens and finally she is the property of Popeye.

De Beauvoir's explanation of the fact that women are oppressed is based on women's existence, that is, what it means to exist as a woman. Girls, growing up are taught by society how to be women. From this concept, de Beauvoir's famous line "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."¹⁹⁰ is born. According to de Beauvoir, femininity is in fact an aspect of gender identity that is gradually shaped by her upbringing. Moreover, for de Beauvoir, gender is not only a cultural concept that is imposed on female identity, but it is also a way of constructing oneself. Judith Butler in her article "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*" further explains the relationship between gender and identity when she writes that:

Simone de Beauvoir does not directly address the burden of freedom that gender presents, but we can extrapolate from her view how constraining

¹⁸⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Lowe&Brydone Ltd., 1956) 15.

¹⁸⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Lowe&Brydone Ltd., 1956) 15.

¹⁹⁰ De Beauvoir, 273.

norms work to subdue the exercise of gender freedom. The social constraints upon gender compliance and deviation are so great that most people feel deeply wounded if they are told that they are not really manly or womanly, that they have failed to execute their manhood or womanhood properly. Indeed, insofar as social existence requires unambiguous gender affinity, it is not possible to exist in a socially meaningful sense outside the established gender norms. The fall from established gender boundaries initiates a sense of radical dislocation which can assume a metaphysical significance. If existence is always gendered, then to stray outside of established gender is in some sense to put one's very existence into question.¹⁹¹

Temple Drake is similarly captivated in the image of the Southern Belle in which she conforms to what the society that she is a part of programmed her to be. After Popeye rapes her we can see her identity disintegrating and she is unable to make sense of herself since she has been dishonored and thus cannot execute her femininity like she did before. In order to find herself, she is then forced to take another gendered identity of a Mississippi prostitute.

By focusing on the Southern Belle in order to emphasize the decline and subsequently death of the antebellum South ideals, yet strangely insisting that those ideals survive in the twentieth century as we can see at the end of *Sanctuary* Faulkner is calling into question not only the archetype of the Southern Belle, but primarily the validity of the whole society that created this archetype and what has it done to women.

If we continue to identify Scarlett O'Hara with the Southern Belle archetype, she actually epitomizes a modern, fallen Belle. If Temple Drake was dishonored former debutante, Scarlett O'Hara is a strong and frustrated Southern Belle that possesses her own voice and has both flaws and qualities. She no longer innocently flirts with men; she uses them and manipulates them. She openly criticizes the institution of bellehood as well as she refuses to honor the holy institution of marriage. Mitchell creates the figure of Scarlett O'Hara as a bad Southern Belle not because she wants to demonize the women who stepped outside their prescribed gender and social roles,

¹⁹¹ Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*." *Yale French Studies*. Simone de Beauvoir: Witness to a Century. No. 72 (Winter 1986), 41-42.

but quite on the contrary, to critique the absurdity of these gender roles that society imposed on Southern women. By creating the figure of Southern Belle that knows and consciously manipulates with all her feminine tricks Mitchell unveils the constructiveness of the gender roles. The foregoing reading of the bad Southern Belle draws on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Although, Butler's theory is applied to the criticism of compulsory heterosexuality, she also suggests erasing the divisions between queer and feminist theory and it is in this way I want to adapt her theory.

Butler, taking up the point de Beauvoir introduced that gender is not a fact of nature, but is produced by discourses in her book *Gender Troubles* elaborates that:

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being. A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, will deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender.¹⁹²

In other words, having a particular gender does not require a gendered subject and consequently, nobody has a gender from the start. Gender is then a social construct that keeps an individual in a certain place and therefore makes him eligible for others. This follows another Butler's idea of gender as a performance which is described by her as an "identity tenuously constituted in time, an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts."¹⁹³ According to Butler, the performative character of gender by its production and reproduction became so naturalized that it is indeed extremely difficult to identify its fabrication. An ideal means of exposing the performative nature of gender is, according to Butler the use of drag: "in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself as well as its contingency"¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 25.

¹⁹³ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*. Vol.40, No 4 (Dec., 1988), 519.

¹⁹⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 175.

Just as Butler employs drag queen to subvert the normative gender roles and reveal the performativity aspect of gender, Mitchell uses the character of Scarlett O'Hara as a fallen belle that by exaggerating her femininity, at least on the surface challenges her culture's notion of true womanhood or true manhood.

With the belief that history and ideology constrain what one can say and how one can say it, I have therefore examined different texts announcing and exploring the both the Old and the New South to see how (and if) they renegotiated the situation of the Southern Belles. How these Southern Belles both repeated and deviated from the discourse and the historical myths (of the Old South, of the Lost Cause of the Southern womanhood) that constrained them and how the image was constructed by Southern writers. By applying archetypal feminism and gender theories to selected works I also showed how the cultural archetype of Southern Belle both replicated and subverted the patriarchal ideology.

Although, this thesis's objective was to trace the development of the Southern Belle archetype in selected works, I am fully aware of the fact that other disciplines, such as psychoanalytic feminism or postmodern philosophical approaches towards race and identity could be also applied. In addition, since I selected only a limited number of texts to illustrate my argument I am convinced that there is a possibility of further research not only terms of different perspectives but also in terms of different texts that show how enduring yet still troublesome figure the Southern Belle is.

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